

Easter 2024 - My Lord and My God

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- [0 : 0 0] The reading today is taken from the Gospel of John chapter 20 verses 1 to 18, 1 to 31, that's why I thought that was 18, 1 to 31. That's found on page 1089 of the Bibles, 1089.
- Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.
- She came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put him. So Peter and the other disciples started for the tomb.
- Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there, but did not go in.
- Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.
- [1 : 1 3] Finally, the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.
- Then the disciples went back to where they were staying. Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.
- They asked her, Woman, why are you crying? They have taken my Lord away, she said, and I don't know where they have put him. At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize it was Jesus.
- He asked her, Woman, why are you crying? Who is it that you are looking for? Thinking he was the gardener, she said, Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.
- Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, Rabboni, which means teacher. Jesus said, Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.
- [2 : 3 4] Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news, I have seen the Lord.
- And she told them that he had said these things to her. On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were all together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them, and said, Peace be with you.
- After he said this, he showed them his hands and sighed. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.
- And with that he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.

Now Thomas, also known as Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with the other disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, We have seen the Lord. But he said to them, Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

[3 : 49] A week later, his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you.

Then he said to Thomas, Put your finger here, see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop doubting and believe. Thomas said to him, My Lord and my God.

When Jesus told him, Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

But these are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name. Thanks, Ruth.

Do keep that Bible passage open, John chapter 20, and you can find an outline in the notice sheet if you find that helpful. But let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word.

[4 : 57] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, who raised our Lord Jesus from the dead, by your Spirit, whom he promised as he breathed on his disciples, would you open your word to our hearts and open our hearts to your word.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. So we're going to be with Thomas. And the first question to ask ourselves is why does John include this story about Thomas?

When you study John's gospel, when you read through it, if you count how many days of Jesus' life John records events for us from, it's probably 21 days.

It might be 22. He is highly selective. And even tantalizingly in his last verse says, Jesus did many other things as well. Why include this account?

We've heard already on the first Easter Sunday, Jesus appears to Mary outside the tomb. Then he appears to the other disciples in the evening. This is a week later with Thomas.

[6 : 00] And more than that, John places this encounter at the very culmination of his gospel. When you read through the gospel, it heads towards Thomas' confession, my Lord and my God.

And the very next thing that John includes is his mission, his purpose statement. So the last chapter, he ties up some loose ends, but his purpose statement is the end of chapter 20 from verse 30.

So it's a book of signs, things Jesus did so that we can believe and by believing, we get life.

Why put Thomas' doubts an encounter right by the purpose of the whole book? And we start to get the answer in verse 24 where we get the background.

Now Thomas, also known as Didymus, one of the 12 was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So it's the next Sunday. Thomas has not personally seen Jesus alive.

[7 : 17] He's gathered with disciples of Jesus just as Christians have done every Sunday since that Sunday. And that's what we're doing right now. In other words, Thomas is you.

He is you and me. What I mean is he's in the same position that we're in. He knows the body is gone. The tomb was empty. No one ever found the body. He's heard witnesses say he's alive.

We saw him alive again. The challenge is, will he believe? And the challenge to us is, do we believe this? And that's the question we can ask whether we're someone here this morning who's not a Christian looking in or brought along with a friend, one of Thomas' friends.

Or you could ask it if you're already a Christian, when we think about, what about when we're really faced with death? The death of someone that we know and love? Or when we think about our own death?

Eleven years ago, I was diagnosed with a brain tumor. I had to have brain surgery that was quite risky because of where the tumor was. And so the surgeon talked to us about the risk that I would die going through the surgery.

[8 : 26] And I'd been a Christian for ten years. But I had to think to myself, is my confidence in the resurrection of Jesus Christ sufficient that I can face this prospect of my own death with courage, with comfort, with consolation, with hope?

When the chips are down, do we believe this? Will we believe it? And this morning, will we believe it? Well, at the start of our scene, Thomas doesn't believe. He says to them, unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

And we're going to look at four things that Thomas discovers. The first is the witnesses Jesus gives us. So is Thomas being reasonable here? We might think on one level he is reasonable because Thomas is a Jewish background believer like Mary and the other disciples.

And for them, the claim that somebody would die and then go through death and out the other side into resurrection life during human history was inconceivable.

They believed in a resurrection at the end of time for all who were faithful. But that idea of someone rising from the dead in time was not conceivable to them. So if you have barriers to believing this this morning, then Thomas is your friend because he had just as many barriers to believing this as we would.

[9 : 58] But, on the other hand, Thomas is probably being unreasonable here. He's got the testimony of the eyewitnesses and it's striking that he has set such a specific set of conditions that he's saying, I won't believe unless God does these things for me.

Did you notice that? I have to see personally. I have to put my fingers where the nails were. I have to put my hand in his side where they pierced it.

Otherwise, I won't believe. Well, what right does Thomas have, what right do any of us have to set our own conditions for believing in the Saviour whom God has appointed?

But so often we do have conditions, don't we? Unless God proves it in this way, I won't believe. Lots of people would think that today.

Or unless God makes my life work out in a certain way, then I will not believe in the God of the Bible. Or unless other people believe it.

[11 : 02] Or someone else, someone in particular believes it, I won't believe. Well, as John records this chapter, he wants to show you and me that he has given us, Jesus has given us, the witness evidence that we need so that we can confidently believe and have life.

Let's think about the eyewitnesses. Mary, seeing Jesus alive again outside the tomb, then ten of the twelve disciples, Jesus comes to them, that includes John who wrote this gospel account, we're reading his eyewitness testimony, and we might think if only I'd been there, I would believe, but there are lots of people who saw miracles from Jesus and they didn't believe, they didn't put their trust in him.

And instead, it's helpful to ask yourself, how many major historical events do you believe happened that you weren't there for? or how many were you actually there for?

How many did you actually see for yourself? We believe things all the time in life that we didn't see and John urges us to trust what the eyewitnesses saw that Jesus rose with a resurrection body and just notice the transformation that it caused for them between verse 19 and verse 21 in the chapter.

So in verse 19, we meet the disciples on the third day after Jesus was put to death. Verse 19, they are together with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders.

[12 : 29] They're hiding. But verse 21, the risen Jesus says to them, as the Father has sent me, so I'm sending you. And this group of men who've been hiding away in fear of their lives go out into the world as the greatest missionary movement the world has ever seen.

willing to die as though they have no fear of death anymore. Why is that? Because Jesus rose and they'd seen him. We can add to our list of eyewitnesses, Thomas, a man who went to the, probably went to the east with the gospel, may well have gone to India.

That's, tradition remembers him in India as having brought the Christian message there. And in verse 26, we get his eyewitness account. A week later, his disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them.

Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them. So he gets special treatment. He gets to see Jesus because he is commissioned to be an apostle. And the apostles, that early band, they had to be eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus as they went out and Jesus worked through them to bring his message to the world.

But for the rest of us, Jesus is saying to Thomas that what we have is enough. In verse 29, then Jesus told Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed.

[13 : 52] Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. So lots of people today think that faith is like a leap into the dark. Just choosing to believe something without evidence.

But Christian faith isn't like that at all. Christian faith is about looking at a set of facts and coming to an understanding of what those facts must mean happened. What is the explanation for those facts?

And through this chapter, there is a movement from people seeing to people hearing the word and believing. So in verse 9, John and Peter see the empty tomb, but we're told they still didn't understand from scripture that Jesus had to rise.

So even though they've seen, because they've not heard the word of God and understood it, they still don't have kind of confident faith. Then you look at Mary, she has seen a lot and she is crying.

She's seen an empty tomb, she meets two angels and she says, they've taken my Lord away, I don't know where they've laid him. She sees Jesus and she thinks he's the gardener.

[14 : 57] It's when she's looking away and she hears words that she believes. She hears Jesus' words, she knows the master's voice and he says to her in verse 16, while she's looking away, Mary.

And she knows his voice and she turns and she cries out, Rabboni! And she takes hold of him. It's the word that gives faith. And then Jesus says at the end there, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

And then we get John's mission statement that he's written this so that we might believe and by believing have life. The word is our witness, sufficient witness, from Jesus so that we can believe.

Now what strikes Thomas next is our second point, it's the people Jesus comes for. Look again at what Jesus says to him in verse 27. Then he said to Thomas, put your finger here, see my hands, reach out your hand and put it into my side.

Now what's striking about that? These are the same words that Thomas used about what he would need else he wouldn't believe. How does he know?

[16 : 05] Thomas must have thought that. How does he know? It's not that he's been appearing to the other disciples all week and they've said, have you heard what Thomas said, Jesus? Rather, it must be that Jesus was there in spirit when John said these things.

I don't know if you've ever had a moment, hopefully not too often, where you said something critical or unkind about someone and then to your horror you realize that they've heard what you said. Well when Jesus speaks here, Thomas realizes that Jesus has been beside him in spirit all along.

He knows what Thomas says, he knows what's in Thomas' heart and yet he has still come for Thomas. So we see his grace here in coming for Thomas.

He could have left Thomas on the outside of the circle of believers when he heard that resolute unwillingness to believe what he'd heard. But he's come for him and that can be a realization that dawns on you when you look back over your own life to find yourself here today.

You might be thinking you've come because you're open to God or searching for God when it could be that you're here because God has come for you and is searching for you. There's a children's novel called *The Horse and His Boy* by C.S. Lewis.

[17 : 24] It's one of the Narnia novels and it's about a boy Shasta who is trying to escape his country and get to Narnia and everything is going badly. He keeps running into wild lions that seem to be a threat.

At one point he's on horseback and a lion appears. He sees a lion alongside them and it terrifies him and the horse and then one night he's in a fog and he hears a voice and the voice guides him to safety and the voice is just called *The Voice* but it's Aslan.

Now Aslan is C.S. Lewis' figure in the books for Jesus the lion and Shasta says to the voice don't you think it's bad luck that I keep having and the voice says I don't call you unfortunate and Shasta complains and says but I keep meeting all these lions and Aslan says there was only one lion I was the lion I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead I was the lion who drove jackals from you while you slept I was the lion who gave the horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you could reach King Loon in time and I was the lion you don't remember who pushed the boat in which you lay a child near death so that it came to shore where a man sat wakeful at midnight to receive you now what C.S. Lewis is saying there as he wrote that book is he's allegorizing his own journey to faith that he was an atheist in his adult life and started looking for God and he came to the realization that all that time

God had been pursuing him Jesus had come for him and for any of us today we might have that experience like Thomas that we feel we've come looking for God but then you look back over your life and you realize that he was patiently beside you the whole time and there was great comfort here that it was Thomas even Thomas in his unbelief even us in our weakness and failings knowing what we've said about Jesus knowing what we've thought about him and he comes to give us life that's our third point as we think about the peace Jesus declares just look with me at verse 26 a week later his disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them though the doors were locked Jesus came and stood among them and said peace be with you he says that three times in the chapter it's a word shalom that's about wholeness of life he said to the 12 the previous week in verse 19 peace be with you then in verse 21 peace be with you and it it links with verse 31 that it's by believing in Jesus that we can have life in his name peace is about receiving shalom receiving life it's a new quality of life because it's life with Jesus life knowing God in a true friendship with him the relationship that we were made for the only thing that can satisfy us so I was reading this week in my newspaper

Susie Goldsbrough was writing about Gen Z brains and she says Gen Z brains were wired for second screening so she was talking about the phenomenon now that most young people watching TV can't just watch TV they have to have another screen on next to them and one thing it's leading to is that subtitles are now much more popular when watching TV because they allow you to be on another screen and then look and just catch up with what's written or it's two things to look at at the same time on the screen so how do we respond to that well what's happening is nothing holds our attention anymore and lots of people say the solution is to make everything grabby you make everything bite size because that's how long we can think for today and American critic Ted Gioia says the fastest growing sector of the culture economy is distraction we just want to be distracted all the time onto the next things well what God offers us and what he made us for is not distraction it's delight and delight is a sense of lasting satisfaction looking in the same direction and we can only find that delight from looking at God because he is infinitely glorious and majestic that's why we find everything else doesn't satisfy and we flip from one thing to the next and when Jesus says peace be with you he's saying

[22 : 00] I've earned your forgiveness so that you can approach God and know God and see God without fear forever it's a different quality of life and it's life that lasts because Jesus has smashed death to bits so he shows the disciples in verse 20 his hands and side and they're overjoyed when they see him because he's saying look at that that was the best that death could do I've defeated it now he burst out from it he smashed it to bits and brings a new age of resurrection life and so every Christian can say death still stings of course it does it takes away people we love but we never grieve without hope and one day Jesus will come and give us resurrection bodies like his radiant bodies and death will be swallowed up forever in Jesus' victory because by death he has defeated death I used to play the cello and several times got to play in the Royal Albert Hall in London and when you perform at the Royal Albert Hall you start in the green room which is one of the dressing room in effect and the green room is pretty dull it's got a low ceiling there's no windows and when you're performing it's kind of strewn with instrument cases and stressed people and changes of clothes and you're waiting for ages in the green room and then the bell rings and it's your time and you walk out through a tunnel onto a stage in the most magnificent building this exquisite historic building with wonderful architecture and you just want to stay there forever it's this wonderful place and the fact of Jesus' resurrection body shows us that this life we're in the green room and we're waiting and one day soon we'll go through the tunnel and now into the greatest place for the main event life that lasts life in the presence of God with no fear because Jesus has said peace be with you have my peace be forgiven come into the presence of God so that we can ask ourselves every one of us what would be the point now of meeting God unforgiven when Jesus is offering you that you can now meet God forgiven so that's our third point the peace Jesus declares but before Thomas responds there's a fourth thing that he sees our fourth point is the marks

Jesus bears when Thomas set out his conditions he said that he'd have to touch the marks in the hand where he was pierced and he'd have to put his hand in the side Jesus offers him that in verse 27 put your finger here he says see my hands reach out your hand and put it into my side stop doubting and believe but Thomas doesn't do it as far as we can see verse 28 Thomas said to him my Lord and my God what's happened Thomas has now understood something that means he surrenders his conditions it could just be that seeing is enough for him I think there's more to it than that he wanted the marks for evidence but now he sees that the marks mean something different that these are the wounds that Jesus has endured to save his friends when Jesus said he was going to go to Jerusalem to die

Thomas said earlier in John's Gospel let's also go that we may die with him and now he knows that like the others he deserted Jesus to die alone and he has doubted even the witness that Jesus lives again but as he sees the wounds he sees that it was always Jesus' plan to die for him crown him the Lord of love who shows his hands and side the poet George Herbert wrote of Jesus on the cross all ye who pass by behold and see Adam stole the fruit but I must climb the tree the tree of life to all except for me was ever grief like mine now when Thomas sees the wounds he gets it the marks that Jesus bears are wounds of love for him and for you and when you grasp that love it's the moment you can surrender your conditions he declares in worship my Lord and my God and what an extraordinary truth for us today that we can say this is my God of a man of whom we're not worthy who saw we were under God's judgment and freely gave himself for us and when you take a step back in this chapter

Jesus transforms every scene he's magnificent first at the garden where the tomb is where he met Mary and he transforms the garden from a place of despair into a place of hope a place of grief into a place of wonder then he's in the room with his disciples and he transforms the upper room from a place of fearful hiding to a place of courageous mission they lock the doors now he sends them out and now he's with Thomas and he transforms the scene from a place of unbelief to a place of awestruck worship don't we want to trust a man like this see the evidence he gives us see the people he's come for the peace he declares the marks on his hands and feet conditions surrender your conditions my Lord and my God let's pray together we praise you heavenly father because you raised

Jesus from the grave that we might believe on him and find life thank you that we can approach you now boldly without fear and take hold of the life he won for us life we were made for life knowing you that lasts thank you for his wounds of love that give us peace by your spirit would you strengthen our faith when our lives are afflicted when we grieve when we fear death lift our eyes we pray to this truth that Christ is risen that death is defeated and we are blessed in him and by that same spirit would you equip us to make him known and grant that many more around us would come to receive the gift of new birth into this living hope through the resurrection of Jesus in his name we pray amen peace to God any more glory we pray 52 are you this may try to awesomegreat