

Stop Doubting and Believe!

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[0 : 0 0] Our reading tonight is from John, chapter 20, verse 24 to 31, which is found on the Church Bible, page 1089. Now Thomas, also known as Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.

So the other disciples told him, we have seen the Lord. Thank you. 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 thigh, I will not believe.

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 into my side. Stop doubting and believe.

Thomas said to him, my Lord and my God. Then Jesus told him, because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

[1 : 1 7] 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.

Well, thank you to Joanne for reading. Let me add my welcome to Darren's. My name is Simon, and I'm a trainee minister here at St. Silas.

Let me pray as we dig into God's word this evening. Father, give us ears to hear you speak by your spirit through your word this evening.

Teach us the truth about Jesus and his resurrection, and help us to believe. Amen. I've had a slightly odd problem since I moved to Glasgow seven years ago, which is that I've been called for jury service five separate times and never actually been to a trial, which means they just keep asking, which is getting quite frustrating, because I think jury service would be something quite interesting to go to.

I know many people who have found the experience quite insightful about how the legal system works. I know people who said that they would never like to go back ever again, because the trial was quite intense.

[2 : 3 7] But for some of you who've been on jury duty will have felt that seriousness of responsibility. The jury in a court will be called to assess the evidence and collectively make a judgment on the cases presented to them, by which a person's life is potentially in the balance.

This person could go to prison based on what this jury decides. And so what they make of the evidence is hugely important. Those making a case are asked to prove their point beyond reasonable doubt.

That's the phrase that gets thrown around. Making a case for the evidence so clear that no better explanation of the facts is forthcoming. And there are many things in life which we may not have complete evidence for, but actually the evidence we do have puts them beyond reasonable doubt.

But actually we know that sometimes when we look at the things in this world, not every doubt we have is reasonable. Often it's just easier to believe the things in our head that we want to be true.

Oh, my team will definitely win. They may have lost all matches this season, but they'll win the next one for sure. Or just thinking, well, maybe this time. Maybe this lottery ticket will be the one that wins because it just feels like my lucky numbers.

[3 : 55] Again, is that beyond reasonable doubt? Well, we wouldn't say so. But we all know that sometimes wanting things to be true just means that we're not really good judges of the evidence because none of us is purely objective.

And so challenging our doubts and figuring out if they are reasonable is an important part of our lives. What we do with the evidence in front of us really matters. And so as we come to tonight's Bible passage, we're presented with a doubting disciple of Jesus.

And we're going to see if we think his doubts are reasonable or not. The passage is also going to ask us what we do with our own belief and doubts. What we do with the evidence of Jesus and his resurrection.

And what we do with that evidence isn't just a matter of opinion for us. Thomas is going to say to us that it's a matter of life and death. And so as we start, I just want to remind us where we are in this story.

It's Easter Sunday here today. So we've been talking about the resurrection all day. It's a day of celebration and joy. And these disciples have been with Jesus all the way through his ministry.

[5 : 05] They've seen the miracles that he has performed. They've seen his teaching. They've eaten with him the night before the crucifixion. They've heard him talk about his death and what it would achieve and the kingdom that would come through it.

They've just witnessed Jesus' betrayal at the hands of their friend Judas. His shameful treatment by the Jews and the Romans and his brutal crucifixion. They watched him die.

Being taken down from the cross and buried. Laid in a tomb. And their hopes buried with him. And it's hard to imagine the grief, the fear, the loss and the desperation of Jesus' followers on that Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

But on Easter Sunday, they find an empty tomb. And Mary sees Jesus. And the great stone has been rolled away.

And the bandages that wrap Jesus' body are discarded. And Mary sees the risen Christ. And hears him talking to her. Saying her name.

[6 : 09] So she rejoices and goes off to tell the disciples what's happened. And where we pick up the story is just after that. In verse 19 we heard one week before where we pick up tonight.

On the evening of that first day of the week when the disciples were together. With the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders. Jesus came and stood among them. So this is the day of the resurrection.

That evening. The disciples have heard that the tomb is empty. But they haven't seen Jesus yet. Only Mary has. But then Jesus declares to them. Peace be with you. And after he said this.

He showed his hands inside. And the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. So the resurrected Jesus has appeared to a room full of his disciples. And declares peace to them.

Those disciples who betrayed him. Who ran away. Who if you're Peter have even denied him three separate times. Are being told that they are at peace. With the risen Jesus who's come back to them.

- [7 : 09] He is alive. And his followers recognize him. Through the holes in his hands inside that are still there. Yet he's not bleeding out. This new resurrected life is in some ways even more alive than he has ever been.
- And the disciples rejoice. Because Jesus has defeated death. He has kept his promises. He has risen never to die again. So think about comparison to the grief and loss before.
- The surprise. The joy. The elation. The delight of the disciples. All their hopes are real. Resurrected. And walking around in front of them. Now they can go and tell everyone.
- But as we pick up that story this evening. We hit a bit of a discordant note in the story. There was a disciple missing when Jesus appeared the first time. Thomas wasn't with the rest when Jesus appeared.
- And he doesn't believe their story. So our first thought for this evening. If you want to follow through. This is on the service sheets. Verses 24 and 25. Is doubting the evidence.
- [8 : 12] Now John doesn't tell us why Thomas wasn't with the disciples that evening. It could be fear or grief or eliteness. We just simply aren't told.
- But it does seem odd that he wouldn't be with the rest of the disciples so soon after what has happened. But when he eventually goes to the disciples. He finds a room full of excited friends.
- Telling him that Jesus is alive. He's really risen. But look at what he says in verse 25. Unless I see the nail marks in his hands.
- And put my fingers where the nails were. And put my hand into his side. I will not believe. I wonder what it would be like for the disciples to tell their friend this news with joy.
- And then to see him say. I don't believe that. I wonder how you hear Thomas' words in that verse. Do you think that those words are reasonable doubt.
- [9 : 16] Or rebellious doubt. Now anyone reading this knows that Jesus. Being alive is not a small thing to believe. Let's say so we know that dead men don't rise.
- And Thomas hasn't seen the risen Jesus either. The disciples have. He has not. Thomas is just doing what I imagine any of the other disciples might have done in the same situation.
- He's being asked to believe a huge miracle without seeing it. And he says unless I see. I will not believe. And I think many of us at an instinctive level resonate with Thomas.
- It's something that just feels in some ways so very modern. Refusing to believe something because you haven't seen it personally. Doubting for the sake of sight.
- There are many people who today would echo Thomas' words for themselves. Something saying unless God shows himself to me personally. Well why should I believe? And I also want to say.
- [10 : 23] There is no Christian who wouldn't love to see the resurrected Jesus personally. This is something we yearn for and hope for. Something that we believe we will have when Jesus comes again.
- That we will see the risen Christ. So anyone reading this story can understand Thomas' desire. But that desire doesn't make this doubt reasonable.
- So read over verse 25 again. And just think what Thomas is really asking. And what he said no to in making his demand. Unless I see the nail marks in his hand.
- And put my finger where the nails were. Put my hand in his side. I will not believe. First he's saying. This Jesus who's been with us. Who has claimed to be God.
- Unless I physically touch the wounds in his body. Well I won't believe. And there's something kind of almost irreverent to that. But I just want you to think. Actually what has Thomas had to deny.

[11 : 24] In order to save earth 25. Because Thomas was called along with the other disciples. And has been traveling with Jesus for years. He's seen Jesus' miracles.

He's seen the blind healed. 5,000 fed. The resurrection of their friend Lazarus. So he knows Jesus' power. He has heard Jesus' words about his identity.

As the Messiah and Son of God. That he's been sent by God. To bring forgiveness to this world. He's heard Jesus' claims. To be the giver of life. And the one with the power to raise the dead on the last day.

He's even heard Jesus' own words. About his own death. And subsequent resurrection. And in the last week. Has heard the disciples say. I imagine over and over and over again.

That Jesus is alive. And yet. In the face of all of that evidence. Thomas says. Unless I see. I will not believe. So what do you think?

[12 : 24] How reasonable. Is that response to the evidence? Because I think. At best. Thomas is slow and fearful. At worst. He could be. Vainly proud.

Demanding evidence. We don't know. John doesn't tell us. Which way to think in this moment. But. In refusing the other apostles testimony. He's essentially saying to them that. He does not believe them.

And that just makes them out to be liars. That all these men. That he's trusted. And traveled with. That Mary herself. That all their testimony is false. Thomas doesn't have a better explanation of the evidence.

Instead. He's just holding belief at ransom. Demanding that Jesus proves himself. With a personal sign. So is it reasonable? But I think anyone reading this.

Might be able to see the same thing in themselves. I know I can. See myself and Thomas in this moment. How quick we are to demand something of God. Before we believe. How quick we are to say to God.

[13 : 29] You have to prove yourself. To me. But what do you think? Was this reasonable? Well I think the best answer to that question.

Is to look at Jesus' response to Thomas himself. So let's move on to our second point. Believing the testimony. We are told in verse 26. That a whole week passes.

With no change from Thomas. And it must have been an awkward week for him. As all of his friends are celebrating the resurrection. But they're still meeting in fear. In a locked room. And then all of a sudden.

One week later. Jesus appears in the locked room again. And it's worth noting. That Jesus keeps appearing in locked rooms. There's just something miraculous. About Jesus' very being in the resurrection. We're not told how he does this.

We'll find out one day. But again he declares peace to them. But now he has. A direct message for Thomas. And I wonder as Jesus turns to Thomas.

[14 : 28] And Thomas sees him. I wonder what's going through his mind. What is he expecting? A rebuke? A judgment? A blessing? A blessing? Jesus clearly knows what Thomas has been saying.

Because follow along with me in verse 27. Jesus says put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand. And put it into my side. Thomas' request was almost irreverent.

He wanted not just to see. But to touch Jesus' wounds. And so that's exactly what Jesus offers him. He's invited to touch. To see this resurrection is real and physical.

And exactly as promised. And so Jesus follows this with an invitation. That has a bit of an edge of rebuke. Stop doubting and believe.

Jesus calls Thomas to believe. To move back from his doubts. To believing again. Out of compassion and love for this weak and struggling disciple. Thomas actually gives him.

[15 : 30] Jesus actually gives Thomas what he asked for. And Thomas is clearly absolutely overwhelmed by this. To the point at which in verse 28. He just declares. My Lord and my God.

And what a wonderful declaration that is. In seeing the risen Christ. Thomas instinctively knows. That Jesus' testimony. All the things that he said. Are true.

But Jesus is not just his Lord. But in fact. The God who made the heavens and the earth. And Thomas' declaration. Isn't just a statement of fact. But it's so personal.

My Lord and my God. Thomas knows in this moment. That Jesus is his Savior. Because he has seen him. And isn't Jesus' gentleness and compassion to Thomas wonderful?

Because Thomas doesn't deserve a shred of this in any way. And yet he gets it in full from the resurrected Christ. Jesus comes to his friends to give him what he needed.

[16 : 35] So that he may not doubt but believe. And we get Jesus' verdict on Thomas in verse 29. Because you have seen me. You have believed. Jesus isn't going to reject Thomas for his doubt.

He has believed. And that is enough. Jesus has shown his kindness to this weak disciple. And nothing will be taken from him. But Jesus uses this event.

To tell his disciples something even greater. Following on in verse 29. Blessed are those who have not seen. And yet have believed. And yet have believed. Essentially.

Thomas should have believed. Because of the evidence he received. Especially the testimony of the apostles. Of the resurrected Jesus. Because every believer.

From Jesus' ascension to heaven onwards. Including anyone here this evening. Who would call himself a Christian. Hasn't seen Jesus in the flesh. But you are blessed.

[17 : 39] Because you believe. This testimony. The gospel. The good news about Jesus. Is what God has used. Is using. And will use. To bring people to repentance.

And faith. All over the world. Forever. And every single person. Who believes in him. Will be blessed. We don't need to think. That because we haven't seen Jesus physically.

We have a second class faith. We are blessed. Because we have heard. And received. And believed the gospel. But finally. Even more than that.

What John tells us next. Is that belief itself. Isn't the end goal. And so our final thought this evening. Is receiving new life. The story of the whole Bible.

Has been one. Of looking for a savior. From sin. Death and hell. That we might. Have a restored life. With God forever. And God throughout.

[18 : 36] The Bible story. Has been calling his people. To believe. To put their trust. And faith. In him and his promises. But belief has never been. An end in itself.

Because faith. Is meant to lead. To eternal life. With God. And John. Consciously. Picks up this idea. In writing his gospel. And in doing so.

Gives his readers. The same challenge. That Jesus. Has just issued. To Thomas. And he says that. In verses 30 and 31. So if you follow along. On the next page. Of those two verses.

John tells us. Why he wrote this. Saying. Jesus performed. Many other signs. In the presence. Of his disciples. Which are not recorded. In this book. But these are written.

That you. Might believe. That Jesus. Is the Messiah. The son of God. So what John tells us. Is that he has been selective. In his account.

- [19 : 31] Of Jesus. That he's recorded. A specific set. Of teachings. A number of signs. In this gospel. That show. Who Jesus is. The very greatest of this.
- We have just read. The resurrection. The resurrection itself. And not only that. He tells us. Jesus has done. A lot of other things. We have three other gospels. In our Bibles.
- And none of them. Are exhaustive. Of all the things. That Jesus did. But they all point to. Who he is. In his identity. As the Messiah. The coming king. Who would save people.
- From sin. And as the son of God. The one. Who eternally. Has been with the father. Since before the creation. Of the world. John has shown us.
- Through this evidence. That he's laid down. For us. That Jesus is. The eternal son of God. And is God himself. And Christian faith. Has never. Just been a mere. Ascent to some facts.
- [20 : 25] But. A personal relationship. And a life with God. And therefore. John concludes. In verse 31. By saying. 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. So the story. Doesn't end. With belief. It ends.
- With new life. Wonderful. Promised. Everlasting. Life with God. These verses. Take on a new significance. Being written. Immediately. After the Thomas episode.
- John has waited. To tell people. His purpose. Of his gospel. Until now. Because right after. The evidence. Of the resurrection. That we most need. To hear this. That when we see. The new life of Jesus.
- We're called. To believe. The evidence. About him. That we may share. In that new life too. John's entire purpose. Of writing this book. Is that all of his readers. Would come to know.
- [21 : 20] Jesus. As their Lord. And their God. As Thomas did. And that is why. We celebrate Easter. Because Jesus. Really was. The son of God. Who died. And rose again.
- That we might have new life. It is Jesus. Kindness to us. Even in our doubts. That we have. A record. Of these stories. Of what Jesus did. That we can read. And believe.
- And be blessed. And have new life. The gospel. Of the resurrected Christ. Gives us hope. Of new life. With God. Forever. And so.
- With that. In our minds. I wonder. What we make. Of the doubt. In this story. I wonder if that changes. Our perspective. On the evidence. So what about you?
- Do you doubt? Or do you believe? Because saying that Jesus rose from the dead. Remains now. A huge claim. But Christianity. Has never ever been.
- [22 : 17] A blind leap of faith. It is based in evidence. And John tells us. That the evidence. That he has collected. In his gospel. Is enough. For us to believe.
- If that's the case. Then maybe this should change. Our perspective. On Thomas a bit. Because John tells us. That belief leads to life. But therefore. If Jesus had not.
- Had the compassion. And kindness. That he had. To show himself to Thomas. If Thomas had just. Persisted in his doubt. And unbelief. Then he would not have life.
- If he stubbornly refused. To believe in Jesus. And his resurrection. He would have wandered away. From all that Jesus had offered. That was a path. That would have led to death. Death. And then.
- When viewed from that perspective. Thomas doubt isn't reasonable. It's actually dangerous. And what Jesus did. Saved him from it. And so that then.
- [23 : 16] Asks us. Well what are we doing. With the evidence. Because Jesus is calling us. To believe in him. So that we may have life. Believing in his identity.

And his resurrection. So are we. Believing in Jesus. Are we still demanding. A sign. And holding our belief. At ransom. Because friends.

If John is right. That is the path to death. The story about Thomas. Is a warning for us. In our doubts. Don't let your doubts. Keep you. From life with Jesus.

Refusing to believe. And demanding a sign. Will drag us away. From the life that is offered. But for anyone. Who chooses. To believe in Jesus. No matter. What doubts. We have had.

Or even still have. We can always choose. To turn and put our trust. In the Lord Jesus. Knowing that he will bless. Any and all who believe. The Christian life.

[24 : 12] Will always be one. Of faith. Even after believing. In Jesus. And his resurrection. Every Christian. Has questions. And doubts. And that is normal. But in those moments.

We come back. To who Jesus is. His compassion. And his kindness. His love. For weak and struggling. Disciples. Knowing that. With a truth. About a savior.

That good. We can battle back. Against all doubts. Jesus. And the truth about him. Is so wonderful. That it calls us. To work hard. At the questions.

That we have. And keep going. Knowing that he is with us. In those doubts. Jesus calls us. To an active. And obedient faith. That works through tough questions.

So friends. Don't let doubts. Derail your Christian life. Fight back. With the truth. About Jesus. You are not being called. To a blind faith. But a living. And active one.

[25 : 07] With confidence. To go out. And tell others. Believing that this message. Really does. Bring people. To new life. In Christ. And so very. Finally.

You might just be visiting. This evening. And I want to acknowledge. That this could be something. That some of you have heard. For the first time ever. Maybe you have just come. For a service.

Because it is Easter. Or a friend has brought you along. Well if that is you. What do you think. Of the resurrection. And it could just be. That you don't know. Who Jesus is yet. And you are not convinced.

Because you don't know the story. If that is you. Then I want you to hear. What John says. As an invitation. These things are written. That you may believe.

That Jesus is the Messiah. The Son of God. And that by believing. You may have. Eternal life. In his name. Believing in Jesus. Is the path. To a resurrected life.

[26 : 01] With him. So if that is you. Then please don't leave today. Without talking to myself. Or Darren. Or any member. Of the staff team here. We would love to. Talk to you about Jesus. And even give you an opportunity.

To take one of the gospels away. So that you can read it. And assess the evidence. For yourself. Because we believe. That Christ is risen. And that by believing in him. We can have life in his name.

Let me pray. Father God. Thank you so much. That you sent the Lord Jesus. To die and rise again.

That we may be forgiven. And have life in his name. Thank you. That we have an account of his life. Through which we can believe. Something that can be passed on. From person to person.

Translated and spread around the whole world. That you may be known everywhere. Father thank you for the life. That we have received in Jesus. And pray that we would know it. Take great joy in it.

[26 : 57] And battle away any doubts. With the truth about your son. And this we pray in Jesus name. Amen.