

John 20

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- [0 : 0 0] So let's turn for a moment back to that passage that we read in John's Gospel, John chapter 20. And we'll find ourselves at some point getting to verse 27 and verse 28.
- The second part of verse 27. When Jesus said to Thomas, stop doubting and believe.
- And Thomas said to Jesus, my Lord and my God. And you can remember these words. Stop doubting and believe.
- My Lord and my God. I will try looking at this in four sections if we can.
- The first one will be to examine the fact that the disciples were scared. They were scared. And secondly, Thomas was stubborn.
- [1 : 1 5] And the third, Thomas was saved. And the fourth, Thomas was sent. Scared. Stubborn. Saved.
- And sent. The last three years have been rollercoaster years for them. They have become dependent upon Jesus. They've been with him during several near-death experiences.
- They've seen countless miracles. And Thomas, to whom we'll turn in a moment, had been appointed as an apostle. And had been given authority to drive out demons.
- They've been sent out with the other eleven to preach the message that the kingdom of heaven was near. They've experienced that. They've been sent out, as recorded in Matthew 10, as a sheep among wolves.
- He was used to danger. When Jesus told the disciples that he was going back to Judea, that this was at the time of Lazarus' death.
- [2 : 2 2] And Jesus delayed going and then he said, okay, I'm going to go back to Judea. And the disciples warned him. They said, but Rabbi, if you go back to Judea, the Jews will stone you.
- They said you were going to stone you if you go back there. And it was Thomas who said to the other disciples, let us also go that we may die with them.
- It was Thomas who said that. We'll go with them. We might die, but let's go. So he was no stranger to danger. Thomas wasn't afraid to ask the difficult questions.
- You know when you're in some meeting or something and the speaker's saying something you haven't got a clue of what it's about. And someone's brave enough to ask the question that everyone else wants to ask but won't.
- Thomas would do that. When Jesus said, you know the way to the place where I'm going, in John 14 verse 4. Thomas said, John 14 verse 5.
- [3 : 1 8] Lord, we don't know where you're going. So how can we know the way? Thomas wasn't afraid to speak up. Compare this with later on in Acts 1.13.
- And we'll just actually read Acts 1.13 because we'll come back to this. Acts 1.13 describes the disciples in another room. And we're going to compare this with the room that we're meeting in as recorded in John 20.

Acts 1.13 says, when they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Martha and Matthew, James, Simon and Judah, son of James.

They all joined together constantly in prayer along with the woman and Mary, the mother of Jesus and with his brothers. So we're going to just keep that thought in our heads. In the days to come, these guys are going to be the greatest guys you can imagine.

Them and the women, they were meeting together in prayer. They're going to be used by God for amazing things and an amazing journey. So we'll come to that. That's later. That's as recorded in Acts. But here we are at the time of Jesus' death.

[4 : 29] And they're scared. The person in whom they trusted had been killed in the most gruesome manner. Their lives were upside down. They'd lost their bearings.

The earth had been wrought, literally, by an earthquake. Darkness had gone over the whole land. And they didn't understand the significance.

They had a lot to talk about. They had much to be scared about. And the world was screaming, he's dead. It's a waste of time. They were maybe thinking, I am nothing.

I'm worthless. Life is meaningless. What do I do now? What direction do I go in? What's the point? And these are questions, of course, that people ask now.

Some of us here may ask them. They don't know. Does anyone ever ask themselves, it's a waste of time? Does anyone ever think, I am nothing? Does anyone ever think, life is meaningless?

[5 : 27] Well, of course people do. People ask this all the time. And that's the position, I think, that these disciples were in. I wonder how many of us lock our doors when we're inside the house.

And maybe some people do. I don't know. Maybe I shouldn't ask. Because then we'll know who doesn't lock the doors. But I wonder, when you're inside the house, in the evening, do you lock the door? Well, we don't.

Okay. Okay. But they locked the door as they met in that room, as recorded in John 20. The doors were locked for fear of the Jews.

Verse 19. They were scared of the Jewish leaders. They were scared. Presumably, they feared being stoned.

Or maybe crucified. They were scared. Now, compare then with Nicodemus or with Joseph of Arimathea. It's recorded.

[6 : 26] We want a time to look at this. But it's recorded in John 19, 38 onwards. In other words, the events that happened after that, when Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus.

And they asked if they could prepare the body. And Pilate said yes. And Nicodemus went with them. Now, that was brave. That was courageous. And these men valued Jesus' death.

They took the body, it says, and it was then who ran it to the strips of linen. So they had a hidden allegiance to Jesus. They were secret disciples, I think.

Both were rich. Both had authority. John mentions Nicodemus three times. The first time was undercover of darkness. He went to see Jesus.

This recorded in John 3. He was dark. He just didn't want to be seen. He went to meet Jesus in the dark. In chapter 7 in verse John, it's recorded that Nicodemus spoke in defence of Jesus.

[7 : 32] And now this, he went up and asked for the body. What gave Nicodemus this courage? Maybe it was the manner of Jesus' death as much as the manner of his life.

Remember the centurion who said, this is the Son of God. The manner of Jesus' death, forgiving those around him as he died, as he said it is finished.

So Nicodemus did a very brief thing. There was a gradual awareness amongst the others. Mary Magdalene and us were read. Peter and John becoming aware that Jesus was risen.

A gradual awareness. John 20 verse 8 saying, finally the other disciple who had reached the tomb first went in sight. He said, even when he saw and believed, he still did not understand from scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

But even when the other disciples had learnt of these things, even when Mary Magdalene had given them the news, she went up to them. And she told them what had happened.

[8 : 32] They were still scared. They still didn't understand. And as we focus on Thomas, he certainly did not believe. Even after we met with Jesus that evening in the locked room, in verse 19, Jesus came.

He met with them. Do you notice in verse 26, as we come to the second encounter in that room, they still locked the door. And it's mentioned, John's mentioned it for a reason.

The doors were locked. Again, they were still scared. Now that was going to change. Big time. As we look towards that, that was going to change. But they were still scared.

And Jesus knew that in the end, it was these men and women. It was these men and women and their spiritual descendants that would bravely take the good news of Jesus Christ to the ends of the world.

It's because of those men and women, of Thomas and the others, that we meet here today. It was because of them. But at this point, they were scared.

[9 : 41] And secondly, Thomas was stubborn. People have named Thomas Doubting Thomas, and he certainly was doubting. But he was also forthright, as we've discussed.

And maybe that would help him to see the gloomy side of things. I don't know. He was certainly stubborn just now. His life was about to change radically. Until now, he had been maybe sort of serving his apprenticeship.

Observing. Asking. Doing as he was told by Jesus. Being sent out. But now he was in no man's land.

He was rejecting Jesus. And he was refusing. Refusing. To believe in him. Now we know that he was about to embark on this amazing journey.

That was to come. We've looked at Acts 1.13. We've looked forward to that. We don't have time to go into it. But he would soon find himself with a group of believers. Praying as never before.

[10 : 40] And being transformed by the Holy Spirit. Now do you know that there's an old community of Christians in South India. In a place called Kerala.

There's a Christian medical college there. There's thousands, tens upon thousands of evangelical believers. Who are absolutely vigorous in going out with the gospel.

And they came to Christ. If you trace it all the way back. It's thought. Through the personal witness of Thomas. It's believed that.

We don't know this for sure. But the people in South India absolutely are convinced of this. That Thomas sailed to India in AD 52. To spread the Christian faith.

And he landed in the port of Mazaris. This is a modern day Kerala state. There was a Jewish community there. And he went to that Jewish community. To tell them about the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

[11 : 40] It's believed that he was martyred in India. And ironically killed by a spear. So his life was about to change. He was going to be transformed into a brave, believing, committed, amazing disciple.

But at this stage he was stubborn. Resisting Jesus. Shutting him out. Blocking him out. Not even there with the disciples in the room. The first time Jesus came. Not even there.

Where was he? I think Thomas was seeing things in two dimensions. He was looking at what he could see. What he could hear. He was interested in what he could be in control of.

He wasn't about to believe what someone else was going to tell him. Whether it was going to be one of the women or indeed one of the men. He wasn't going to believe what someone else was telling him.

He was going to decide what it would take for him to believe. No one was going to tell him what he needed to do to believe. Thomas was in a storm. Thomas was in a storm. Thomas was in a storm. Thomas was going to get through the storm in his own way.

[12 : 45] Where was Thomas when the disciples met that first time? That first evening. I don't know who he was. Was he doing things his own way? Was he stubborn? Was he determined? And maybe also was he demoralised?

Thomas had forgotten. Do you remember the story? One of the accounts of the boat in the storm in the Sea of Galilee. There's one recorded in Luke chapter 8.

When the storm came up and Jesus was asleep. And he shouted, Master, we're going to drown. And Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and the waters. And the storm subsided and all was calm.

And Jesus said, where is your faith? And in fear and amazement, they asked one another, who is this? He commands even the wind and the water and the Obeon.

Thomas had forgotten this. Of course, we forget so quickly too, don't we? We forget all the time. Thomas had forgotten how to get through a storm by trusting Jesus.

[13 : 46] He'd forgotten. And now he knew Jesus was dead and he refused to believe. He was doing things his own way. And he thought he would have to put his fingers where the nails were.

And he would have to put his hand in the side of Jesus where the spear had gone in. And he said, if I don't do that, I will not believe. Now, of course, the application here is how many of us are like this?

How many of us are like this? I can remember in my own testimony wanting to believe in Jesus. And I asked God to make it plain to me. Write it on the pavement, Lord.

Just tell me that you're there. Write it somewhere. Make it easy for me. Now, what it actually took for me to believe in Jesus was I was sitting in the house over in Newark with Kirsty's mum and Kirsty's dad and Kirsty's dad, Dr Hayley, called us in to worship on a Sunday night.

And I went into that room not believing in the existence of God. And as I entered that room, I met with Jesus. I met the risen Lord. I couldn't see him, but I met him and I believed.

[14 : 59] I met the risen Lord in Newark and Lewis with Kirsty's mum and dad. I'd wanted it written on the pavement for me. And I met him and I knew it.

Thomas thought he needed something physical, something to touch. He said he stubbornly refused to believe until he could physically touch Jesus. But in the end, he only needed to meet the risen Jesus.

That's what anyone needs to do. Those in our community should not meet him. They only need to meet with Jesus. And then they'll run to Jesus or the runaway friend.

But they need to meet with him. So scared, stubborn, and then saved. When Jesus met with Thomas, he said, stop doubting and believe.

Believe what? Believe in the existence of Jesus? Well, even that is not sufficient because the devil acknowledges Jesus' existence. Is saying the word Lord a sign of salvation?

[16:00] No, it isn't. Look at Romans 10 verse 9. That if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Confessing, believing, and salvation are personal things. They're something that we do in personal relationship with God. Not necessarily private because it wasn't for Thomas, but very personal.

What did Thomas doubt? He doubted that Jesus was not only fully human. He doubted that he was fully God. He doubted that Jesus was victorious over death.

He doubted that Jesus could be a saviour. He even doubted that it was possible to believe without seeing. What did Jesus require Thomas to believe?

Jesus required Thomas to believe that he was fully human and fully God. Jesus required Thomas to believe that he was victorious over death.

[17:05] He was risen. Jesus required Thomas to believe that he had authority to be his saviour. And Jesus needed Thomas to believe that it was possible to believe without seeing.

And this was to be crucial to Thomas' ministry. Thomas was going to be telling people that he'd met Jesus. They were going to see him. But they were going to believe.

So it's worth noting that even Thomas had previously called Jesus Lord. It's written in John 14 verse 5. Lord, we don't know where you're going. So how can we know that way? So he used the word Lord.

But he didn't mean it as he did in John 20. Jesus states in the Sermon on the Mount. Not everyone who says to you, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. But only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

We won't have time to look at this. But I was reading John Stott's book of the Sermon on the Mount from the series The Bible Speaks Today.

[18:07] And what John Stott says is it's not enough to call Jesus Lord. It's not enough to listen to his preaching. We need to mean what we say and we need to do what we hear.

All this commitment has our final destiny. He says, The man who obeys God as Lord is wise like building a house in a rock.

The storms will come but nothing can undermine it. Jesus' authority is an authority to which the followers of Jesus of every generation must submit.

Thomas needed to submit to the authority of Jesus. And you and I need to submit to the authority of Jesus on a daily basis. We need to submit to Jesus' authority. The issue of the lordship of Jesus is as relevant today as it was then.

Jesus as Lord. So Jesus as Lord. The religious Jews reacted. They rejected his authority. The choice was to submit or to silence him.

[19:12] And of course we can silence Jesus by closing our Bibles. We can silence Jesus by closing our ears to this message. We can silence Jesus by not meeting with him in our houses.

We can still think we're alright and we can silence him. We can stop him speaking to us if we so desire. And we all do this from time to time. Examine our lives and our thoughts and we'll find that we frequently are silencing Jesus.

We can submit or we can silence him. Jesus said, my father has always worked at this very day and I too am working. And the Jews reacted by trying to kill him.

So, Jesus as Lord, he came to offer life. Thomas had a choice. Submit or reject. Now, when Jesus said to Thomas, he commanded Thomas, he said, stop doubting and believe.

Thomas reacted by saying, my Lord and my God. Thomas didn't need to put his finger in the holes in Jesus' hands.

[20 : 23] Thomas didn't need now to put his hand in Jesus' side. Jesus had offered him the opportunity to do that. It's not recorded that Thomas did that.

I don't think he needed to because he met with the risen Jesus and he said, my Lord and my God. He said, my Lord and my God.

And you're the Lord. He didn't say, you're a God and you're a Lord. He said, you're my Lord and you're my God. It was personal submission.

And this is the essence of our faith. We can't assume Jesus as Lord by any of the rituals or traditions we've formed. Even coming here today doesn't mean that we declare or that we actually have Jesus as our Lord.

It's personal submission in our hearts. Jesus met with Thomas that day. It wasn't private. But it was very, very personal. So we've discussed how scared the disciples were.

[21 : 51] How stubborn Thomas was. We've looked at how he came to be saved. Lastly, let's look at how Jesus sent them. You see, there's a very personal link between that gathering in that room on that day and, as I've said, us gathering here in this room this day.

There's a very strong link between the two. You see, these disciples had to be back on that meeting and on several others which would take place after the resurrection.

And they had to understand that Jesus was sending them. Now this is key. So none of us here are off the hook. We may be saved and think, well, that's fine, but I do submit to Jesus.

Well, listen to these words about how Jesus sent those men and women. Because had they not listened, we wouldn't be here today. And if we don't obey the command about being sent, then who's going to do the work that's required?

Who's going to do God's work that he's commanding us to do? There's people to the ends of the earth who don't know anything about Jesus. There's people in this country who don't know anything about Jesus.

[23 : 04] It's irrelevant about talking about Easter in the sense of festival, except we need to be aware that Britain is making note of this day.

And most people in Britain don't know the first thing about it. Not the first thing. The Sun newspaper had an article. I was looking up about the connection to various things on Easter and what goes through people's head.

And it said, there's an article on the Sun. This is why we're Easter bunnies. This is why we're Easter red. And this is the meaning of Easter. And it was just laid out a very nice summary as to what Christians believe about Easter.

But it needs a national newspaper to actually spell it out because people don't know. So we need to be aware of this. The world has got this thing called Easter. We need to understand what God is doing with us in the world.

When people don't know the first thing about what Jesus has done. So Jesus was sending them. Jesus as he met with them said, peace be with you, verse 21.

[24 : 06] As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. Jesus went on to say, because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

So their ministry was going to be about telling others about Jesus. So other people could meet with Jesus without seeing him. Some of these men would be used to write the very words of scripture that we are reading today.

Because they took the call seriously. They were used to write the very words of scripture that we are reading today. It says, Jesus had many other miraculous signs, verse 29, 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 Christ, the Son of God. And that by believing you may have life in his name. Why did John write the gospel? Why did he write this?

Yes, he was commanded to. Why did he write it? He wrote these words so that we would believe. And he wrote these words so that other people would believe.

[25 : 15] That's why he wrote this. It's summed up there in verse 29 and 31. These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And that by believing you may have life in his name.

That's the message they took from Jesus. When he said, I'm going to send you. He was in that room with the door locked. He said, I'm sending you. They obeyed.

Jesus came to them and said, All authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations.

Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. The end of Matthew's gospel.

He gave them this commission. John made sure that everything done, and its purpose was that we too would believe. Look at John chapter 1. Look at the very start of this gospel.

[26 : 12] Look at how John starts it off in chapter 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made.

He describes the light, and he describes the darkness. He said the true light gives light to everyone that was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world didn't recognize him.

And he says, Yet all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. And he says, verse 14 of chapter 1, We have seen this glory.

The glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. They began to understand this day in the locked room. They were beginning to understand this. As the days went on, as they met with Jesus, they really understood it.

As the Holy Spirit came down in Acts, it was recorded in Acts, they really grasped it. They understood, and he said, we have seen his glory. John had to write it down, so that we too might believe.

[27 : 18] So he understood his purpose. The question for us therefore, is what's our response to this? What is our response to this?

Can you identify with Thomas, with his anxiety? With the world screaming he's dead, it's a waste of time. I am nothing, life is meaningless.

Is that where you're at just now? Is the world screaming at you? It's not true. This Christian stuff. It's not true.

No, God's not real. Is that where the world's screaming at you just now? Is the world screaming, don't bother about being pure until you're married.

Do what you want with your bodies. Is that where the world's screaming at you just now? Is the world screaming you're nothing? Life is meaningless. Is it screaming what do I do now? What direction do I go in?

[28 : 15] Is the world saying, what's the point? Now the chances are that there will be people here thinking these thoughts just now. But the question I would have is, are you stuck in your stubbornness like Thomas?

Will you only believe in your own terms and in your own way? And if that's you, Jesus is saying to you, stop doubting and believe.

Stop doubting and believe. And your response has to be this. It has to be, I believe.

I turn to you, God. I worship you. I hunger and thirst after righteousness. I'm sorry, God, for failing you. Accept me in all my failings and forgive me all my failings.

You, Jesus, are my Lord and my Saviour. My Master. My everything. And Lord, I give you these words in the midst of a troubled world that screams lies at me.

[29 : 21] But in the midst of this world, I praise you and submit to you as my Lord and my Saviour. So who are we remembering today? It's not the human nature of Jesus.

It's not a historical event only. We're remembering the death and resurrection of the Son of God. His death, achieving a lasting salvation for all who believe.

And a footnote, perhaps, for those of us who have met with Jesus already, and to already proclaim him as our Lord and Saviour. I'm going to read from James Montgomery's commentary on this section.

Boyce says, Thomas concludes the story with the highest profession of belief in Jesus recorded in the pages of any of the Gospels. He worships him and says, My Lord and my God.

And we sometimes give the impression that because people who are hopelessly lost in sin, only God can save them. Only God can save them.

[30 : 30] We might think that there's little that we can do. Was that the reaction of the men and women in that room that day? Did they think, There's nothing we can do.

So no God says, John, I'm not going to write down your words for me in the Gospel. And Thomas says, I'm not going to Kerala to tell that Jewish community, You can do that, Lord.

Only God can save. So I'm not going to meet in an upper room. Only God can save. I'm not going to preach to two, three thousand people. Only God can save.

I'm not going on a missionary journey. Only God can save. I'm not going to go to the person next door. That would be more stubborn than Thomas.

And that must not be our reaction. When a person will not believe, Or even not come naturally into a fellowship of Christians, We tend to give up when we say, Well, they're not coming to church.

[31 : 30] There's nothing we can do. Is it beyond the wit of mine To leave the church and go into people's houses In order that they can meet with God there? I came to know God for the first time in a house.

Not in a church. I came into family worship. And I met with the risen saviour there. People will meet Jesus through his word And through his messengers, his ambassadors.

Who take the word in their lives. And the rather spoken truth is, That's you and me guys. That's our job here. We are the direct spiritual descendants of Thomas and Thomas.

That's us. We either do the job, Or we say to Jesus, We're not doing the job. There is no middle ground. Be prepared to do the job. There's no excuse for us to do nothing.

We must seek out the lost. And we must say to them, The Lord is risen. Come with us and believe in Jesus. The thing that convinced Thomas wasn't the empirical test he demanded.

[32 : 38] The thing that saved Thomas was meeting with Jesus. We know where he ended up. We know where he did. Remember, Jesus said, As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.

We're being sent. We're being sent. We're being told to give generously of our prayers. To give generously of our time. To make it our interest to read about Egypt.

And North Korea. And Pakistan. And India. To understand where God's people are being persecuted. To seek out the dark areas of the world. Even in Scotland.

And to pray for them. It's our duty to do that. You may not go on your own two feet. But it's our duty to understand. And to pray. And to use our resources. We've got plenty.

We've got a nice posh church here. We may not see that to you. There's a lot posher than the churches that have been bombed in Iraq. And in Syria. We've got a duty to use this. How can we contribute?

[33 : 43] We're not being called to stay in a building. Just as the disciples were not being called to stay in a mock room. We've been called to get up. And to go.

And to proclaim the risen Lord. To the ends of the earth. So I finished with two questions. I asked some of you. Are you willing to be saved?

And I asked the rest of us. Are we willing to be sent?