April 29/30, 2023

The Resurrected Jesus and Our Doubt

Here and Now Series

John 20:19-31

Pastor Bryan Clark

There are so many things about the great heroes of the faith that we wish we knew, but we don't. But there's certainly one thing we know for certain, and that is the great heroes of the faith never had seasons of doubt. Right? *(laughter)* Let's talk about that. If you have a Bible, turn with us to John, Chapter 20. We are in the midst of a series where we are looking at how the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus—then and there—impacts our lives in the—here and now. Two weeks ago, Jeff talked about how the resurrected Jesus meets us in our sorrows, looking at the story of Mary Magdalene. Last week, Matt talked about how the resurrected Jesus impacts our confusion, looking at the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. This week, we want to talk about how the resurrected Jesus impacts our seasons of doubt. We pick it up in verse 19:

> **So when it was evening on that day, the first *day* of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews…** (*NASB, John 20:19a)

I just want to go that far in the verse and kind of set the background for the story here. This would have been the evening of Resurrection Sunday, so the encounter with Mary Magdalene, the encounter with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and this encounter with the disciples all happen on the same day. This is the evening of Resurrection Sunday. John records it as **the first day of the week**. This is not just a reference to the fact that it was Sunday. John has all these little hints in his Gospel that this is the fulfillment of the promise. This is actually the beginning of new creation. You had original creation and the fall, and all that goes with that, but as of the moment Jesus rose from the dead in a garden, this was the beginning of something new and something different: the fulfillment of the promise. Matt talked about this a little bit at the end of the service last week. The disciples are in a room in hiding. Some people think it was the Upper Room; that may or may not be the case, but what we do know for certain is **the doors were shut**. And what's implied in that is the doors were shut and locked, and they're in hiding, and we don't have to guess why. The text tells us because they were absolutely terrified **for fear of the Jews**.

So just be clear what these guys have been through: On Thursday they were in the Upper Room with Jesus, and one can only imagine how incredibly intense those conversations were. They leave, and they go to the Garden of Gethsemane. I think one of the reasons they were so exhausted and fell asleep is because the intensity level was just so high. Out come the soldiers and they arrest Jesus and the disciples; fearing for their lives, they scattered. So they would have, in different perspectives or vantage points, witnessed the arrest of Jesus, the trials of Jesus, the absolutely horrific torture of Jesus, and then the gruesome crucifixion and death of Jesus. They had to have been absolutely traumatized and terrified. Jesus is buried, but now word is leaking out three days later that the body is not in the tomb, and the body is missing. So, they had every reason to be absolutely terrified that they were next—and the Jews were coming for them. So they're locked down; they're terrified! And in the midst of that, Jesus appears:

> **…Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace *be* with you." And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.** (Vs. 19b-20)

So Jesus appears. Clearly He didn't knock on the door. Did Jesus come through the door? Did He come through the walls? Did He just appear? We aren't really told. But it is Jesus literally, physically, bodily. Jesus appeared before them and uttered the words, **"Peace be with you."** The Greek word that is translated "peace" is as close as we get to the Greek word that connects with the Hebrew word "shalom". It is filled with all kinds of meaning and was a very important word in the conversation with Jesus and His disciples in the Upper Room. Jesus told them in a couple of conversations there, that He was giving them His peace, a peace that the world cannot give them, but that He can give them.

These disciples would have had no idea that what was necessary for Jesus to fulfill that promise, was that He would first have to make it possible for them as sinful men to have peace with a holy God, and that would require His crucifixion for the sins of the world. He would be buried and rise from the dead, giving them a hope and a future that, no matter what they would face, no matter what they go through, they would have every reason for peace. So Jesus has now done what was necessary to fulfill the promise to give them peace.

I think these men had learned over time, that as long as Jesus is with us, everything's going to be okay. I think it took them a while to learn that, to become utterly dependent upon Him. But if there was not enough wine for the wedding, no problem! Jesus will turn the water to wine. If you don't have enough food to feed 5000 hungry people, no problem! "We just need a few loaves and fishes." If you're out on the Sea of Galilee, and it's a storm that you think is going to kill you. No problem! Jesus is in the boat. Everything's going to be okay. Whether you're lame, whether you're blind, whether you're sick, even whether your dead, Jesus raised the dead to life. They had come to believe that, "As long as Jesus is with us, everything's going to be okay." But now Jesus is dead. He's gone. He's not with them, and they are confused, and they are traumatized, and they're trying to figure this out.

When Jesus appears in their midst, and He tells them, **"Peace, be with you**," I think it's very interesting the way John records verse 20. Because what John tells us is that Jesus initiated showing them His hands and His side. They didn't ask for that, but Jesus understands. These men are traumatized; they are terrified, and they are very confused. What they're being asked to believe is really remarkable! Jesus understands they're struggling. He doesn't yell at them; He doesn't scold them. But rather He meets them in their struggle, and He takes the initiative to say, "It's really Me. Check it out. Look at my hands. Look at my side." And John writes this very carefully, when he says **the disciples then rejoiced**. They saw the evidence, and then they believed. **The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord**. Verse 21:

> **So Jesus said to them again, "Peace *be* with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, *their sins* have been forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they have been retained." (Vs. 21-23)**

So it's interesting after Jesus shows them His hands and His side, and they believe, He says it again, **"Peace be with you."** You're never going to know peace as long as you doubt. Jesus understood that. He understood how confusing this was. So Jesus showed them the evidence. They believed, and so He repeats it, "*If you believe, then peace be with you.*" Then He breathes on them, and gives them the Holy Spirit. This again is one of John's hints that this is the first day of new creation. This takes us all the way back to Genesis chapter two, verse seven, when in the first creation Adam, made in the image of God, was filled with the very breath of God, as God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. But now the fall, and the mess, and all that's taken place, but God has fulfilled His promise. This is the first day of something new. For Jesus breathed into them His very presence, the life of the Spirit in them, to experience life now in the new creation. Empowered by the Spirit of God, He would send them out on mission.

The text is kind of confusing the way it's written. It is not saying that the disciples would say who is forgiven and who is not forgiven. It is saying that they would be proclaimers of the message of the gospel, and those who receive it, have their sins forgiven. Those who reject it, remain in their sins. It was their job to declare that message, and that was the reality of the message that they were delivering. For our purposes, we move on to verse 24:

> **But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."** (Vs. 24-25)

So Thomas is one of "the Twelve". He also has the name Didymus, which was his Greek name. It's a word that means twin. That's really all we know about that. It's very common for these people to have both a Jewish name and a Greek name. For whatever reason, Thomas was not with them when Jesus appeared to them. Now there's no reason to read anything negative into that. The disciples had scattered. There were lots of disciples, and maybe he was hiding out with some other disciples. Maybe he went to get food or something else. All we know is he wasn't there. So when the disciples say to him, "We have seen the Lord," Thomas responds by saying, **"Unless I see His hands and His side, I will not believe."** It's that statement that earns Thomas the unfortunate label of *Doubting Thomas*. The reality is he was not asking for anything more than what the others had already seen. And Jesus is the One that took the initiative to show the others His hands and His feet. I find it a perfectly reasonable request.

So what do we know about Thomas? Actually, very little. Most of the time, he's just listed in the list of the 12 apostles. John is the only Gospel writer that gives us three glimpses of Thomas. The first one is in chapter 11. In chapter 10 of John, Jesus and the disciples are down around Jerusalem in Judea, and it has become extremely dangerous. As a matter of fact, the religious Jews pick up stones, and they are going to seize Him and kill Him. So He and the disciples flee up north to Galilee, to get away from the danger. While up north in Galilee, word comes that his dear friend Lazarus is dying. So Jesus tells the disciples, "I have to go." Lazarus is in Bethany, which is just across the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem. Extremely dangerous! So the disciples work their hardest to talk Jesus out of it, "You can't…You can't go; they will kill You." Finally, when it's clear Jesus is going, in verse 26, it's Thomas that says, ***"Come, let us go with Him that we may die with Him."*** Thomas was fiercely loyal. Thomas was courageous to the core. This wasn't

some emotional, exaggerated statement. It was reasonable to think if Jesus goes back, they will kill Him, and they will kill us with Him. When he said it, he meant it. ***"Let us go with him that we may die with Him."*** That's Thomas!

The next time you see him is in chapter 14. They're in the Upper Room. Jesus says to them, "I have to go away, and I'm going to be gone for a while, but you can come to Me. You know the way." They're all thinking it, but Thomas is the one that says it. ***"Lord, we don't know where You're going. How could we possibly know the way?***" Again, Thomas is fiercely loyal. He's courageous. He just wants to be with Jesus. "Tell us where you're going. That's where I want to be."

That question gives birth to one of the most beloved verses in our Bible, as Jesus responds by saying, ***"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me."*** That's Thomas! So now Thomas is simply asking to see what they have seen. These men are confused. They're terrified. They're shaken. It's not unreasonable for Thomas to wonder what these guys are talking about. What have they actually seen? And emotionally, he's not going to believe unless he sees it himself. Verse 26.

> **After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace *be* with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing."** (Vs. 26-27)

So the way the Jews calculate days, **eight days** would have been a week later. This is the next Sunday. They are maybe in the same room, maybe not. But they're still hiding; they're still terrified. The door is shut and locked. And once again, Jesus appears in their midst. And once again, Jesus says, "**Peace be with you."** As long as you doubt, you will not know peace. Jesus knows this. That's why He has showed Himself to the others, and that's why He immediately turns to Thomas. He offers Thomas the same thing He offered the others. "Check it out for yourself. Look at My hands; look at My side; stick your hand in there; touch Me."

Now just stop and think about what these people were being asked to believe: To believe that their friend, the person they had walked with and talked with and done life with, who had been gruesomely crucified on a cross and buried is actually alive and standing before them! That's a lot to comprehend; it's a lot to take in. But Thomas, in that moment, seeing the evidence, utters what is the most declarative statement of who Jesus is by any person, anywhere in the Gospels.

> **Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"** (Vs. 28)

Absolutely remarkable! Stop and think about what it would be like to think about: This is your friend. You've walked with him. You've talked with him. You've laughed with him. You've eaten with him. You've done life with him. And you're being asked to comprehend, that not only is He the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, the Savior of the world, He is actually the God of the universe in human flesh. That is absolutely mind blowing. It's remarkable that in that moment, having seen the evidence, Thomas, utters, **"My Lord, and my God!"**

These are the bookends of the Gospel of John. It starts in chapter 1*: "**In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."*** It bookends, having seen all the evidence that John has recorded, with Thomas' statement: **"My Lord and my God!"** Verse 29:

> **Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed."**

So Jesus says, "Thomas, it's great that you believe that. You can't really know My peace as long as you doubt, and he believed! But blessed are all those who are going to believe, having not seen and touched what you have seen and touched," meaning all those that would follow. But John is not saying you are without evidence. As a matter of fact, that's the very next thing he says:

> **Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.** (Vs. 30-31)

There's more than enough evidence recorded from the eyewitnesses to the events that we might believe. One of the reasons I don't like the label, Doubting Thomas, is because Thomas was not asking for anything more than what the others had already seen, and which Jesus willingly took the initiative to offer. What these people were being asked to believe is staggering. But I also don't like the label, Doubting Thomas, because I think it implies that if you doubt, you're on the naughty list. If you doubt, you're a bad Christian. "You go to your room, and you think about that for a while." So what happens is we pretend we don't doubt. We suppress it. We hide it, because if you doubt, then you're a bad Christian. But that's simply not true. We all have our seasons of doubt.

The great heroes of the faith all had their seasons of doubt. As a matter of fact, it's doubt that directs us to the truth, as we pursue answers to our questions. Jesus doesn't meet us there to scold us. Jesus doesn't meet us there to say, "What is your problem?" Jesus doesn't push us away and say, "I really don't want to spend time with you if you're going to be a doubter." It's just the opposite. Like with all the disciples, like with Thomas, He lovingly meets us there and helps us to understand and believe.

Gary Habermas, in his book, *Dealing with Doubt*, identifies three categories of doubt, which I find very helpful. The first category is what he calls *Factual Doubters*. A factual doubter is simply someone investigating these truth claims. We're not saying the message of the gospel is some fairy tale that somebody made up. We're saying it's actually rooted in human history. You can investigate it; you can challenge it; you can figure it out. Thomas was a factual doubter. Once he saw the evidence, he believed.

In the Life Group questions this week, and in the transcript from this sermon, we're including a list of resources to help you with that. * There's nothing wrong with being a factual doubter. It's often that doubt that leads you to the truth. So we want to provide resources that can help you get there.

The second category is what he calls *Emotional Doubters*. For emotional doubters, it's more in their emotions. There's a lot of hurt; there's a lot of pain. There's a lot of struggle, and no amount of facts seem to make it go away. If Thomas was an emotional doubter, he would have touched the hands, touched the side of Jesus, but he would have said, "Okay, but I don't know. I'm still not sure. What if it doesn't really work?" "What if I'm not really saved?" "What if this isn't really true?" That's emotional doubt. There's something else going on there, and no amount of facts is going to solve that. So the idea of emotional doubt is that something has happened that has hurt you. Maybe you think God let you down. Maybe you think God wasn't there for you. Maybe you think God didn't keep a promise. Something's happened that has deeply wounded you, and that's what the issue is. So, no matter how many facts you're presented with, you're still struggling with, "I don't know; I'm not sure about this. Maybe God doesn't even like me." In Habermas's book, which is also on the list of resources, he gives some very helpful information to help you work your way through trying to figure out what is it and how can you work your way through to some resolution of that doubt. It may also be helpful to talk to a trusted friend. It may be helpful to talk to one of the pastors. It may be helpful to talk to your Life Group leader or a spiritual caregiver. If for you, it's emotional doubt, it's painful. Don't just sit there in that. Jesus wants to meet you there. He wants to help you, but you have to figure out what is that doubt, and how do you work it through to resolution, so that you might experience the peace that He offers?

The third category is what he calls *Volitional Doubters*. Volitional doubters are simply people that choose not to believe. "I'm just not going to believe." It doesn't matter what the facts are, doesn't matter how much evidence there is. This is the Pharisees. It doesn't matter how many miracles Jesus did. It doesn't matter whether He rose from the dead or not, they won't believe. This is a choice for the will. "I don't care. I won't believe, and that is what it is!"

Thomas was a factual doubter. When he saw the evidence, he believed. He believed to such an extent that he would dedicate the rest of his life to proclaiming the message of a resurrected Savior. Thomas, according to history, would make his way to India, would preach the gospel in India, and ultimately, in AD 72, he was stabbed to death with a sword from people who no longer wanted to hear the message of Jesus and the gospel. I've actually stood at the memorial site outside of Chennai, India, where Thomas was martyred for a message he believed and proclaimed all the way to his death. That doesn't sound like a doubter to me. That sounds like someone who saw the evidence, and really, truly believed.

Wherever you find yourself, your doubt can lead you to the truth. Jesus wants to meet you there. He wants to help you through that, in order that you might believe, and that by believing, you might find life in His name.

> *Our Father, we celebrate that what we declare, it's not a myth. It's not a fairy tale. It's a story that is rooted and grounded in history, a story that can be investigated, a story that can be challenged, a story that can be believed. God, wherever we find ourselves this morning, may we invite You into our doubt, that You might lead us through it to the truth that we might believe…and in believing, find life. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

*_____ Books:

Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998).

Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000).

Dr. Gregory A. Boyd and Edward K. Boyd, *Letters from a Skeptic: A Son Wrestles With His Father's Questions About Christianity* (Colorado Spring, CO: David C Cook, 2008).

Alister McGrath, *Doubting: Growing Through the Uncertainties of Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

Gary R. Habermas, Dealing with Doubt (Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House, 2022).

Dr. Lynn Anderson, *If I Really Believe, Why Do I Have These Doubts?* (Howard Books, 2000).

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988, 1995
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2023 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.

lincoln berean

SPRING 2023 // WEEK 3

Life Group Questions

Easter Here and Now // April 29-30, 2023

The Resurrected Jesus and Our Doubt // John 20:19-31

Introduction

In this week's text, the risen Jesus makes two appearances to his disciples—one with Thomas absent and one with him present. Our focus is on the second appearance of Jesus and his interaction with Thomas. From Thomas' encounter with Jesus, we will learn some valuable lessons about belief.

Processing our doubts can be very challenging, and it is important to do so in a community of those pursuing Jesus and seeking to grow in their faith. Many times, thinking through our doubts leads us to greater faith. In addition to your discussion with your group here are some more resources you may find helpful.

Books

The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus by Lee Strobel
The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity by Lee Strobel
Letters from a Skeptic: A Son Wrestles With His Father's Questions About Christianity by Dr. Gregory A. Boyd & Edward K. Boyd
Doubting: Growing Through the Uncertainties of Faith by Alister McGrath
Dealing With Doubt by Gary Habermas
If I Really Believe, Why Do I Have These Doubts? by Dr. Lynn Anderson

Podcasts

Stand to Reason
Cold Case Christianity

Websites

www.resaonablefaith.org
www.garyhabermas.com

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. Due to preferences over a wide range of groups, we do not expect you will cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

1. What is the best thing that has happened to you this week?

2. What is something you were completely certain of until you found out you were wrong?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
    a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
    b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
    c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you

2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

1) What is one thing you learned about Jesus from this week's sermon?

2) It is from this passage of Scripture that Thomas is called "Doubting Thomas" and why we call skeptical people "Doubting Thomases." Is the label "Doubting Thomas" a fair description of Thomas? Why or why not?

Why do you think Thomas didn't believe the claims of the other disciples? Why do you think he so quickly believed when he saw Jesus?

As best we know. Thomas was speared to death in India as a martyr. **What does Thomas' death say to you about the kind of person he was?**

3) **What is the difference between doubt and skepticism?**

Can doubt ever be useful? Explain your answer.

How should we deal with our doubts about our faith? Is there anything in this week's passage that helps us address our doubt?

4) How would you define belief (e.g., believing charity is good or believing a promise your friend makes)? Is it more than merely accepting something as true? Explain. (Look at John 20:30-31 as you consider your answer).

How would you characterize Thomas's belief?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts. Next week in Life Group, take a few moments to share how the Lord may have used this exercise in your life.

Prayer Focus: As Thomas found resolution of his doubt through his encounter with the risen Jesus, so too can we. Spend some time this week talking to Jesus about any doubts you have about the truth of the Christian message. Be honest about your doubts. Like the father who asked Jesus to heal his demon-possessed son (Mark 9:14-27), make this request, "I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief."

Scripture Focus: Every day this week read and reflect on a different account of people whose doubts were removed because of an encounter with Jesus.

Day 1: John the Baptizer doubts whether Jesus is the Messiah (Matthew 11:1-6).

Day 2: Peter's doubts prohibit him from walking on water (Matthew 14:22-33).

Day 3: Nathanael doubts Jesus is the Messiah (John 1:43-50).

Day 4: A Samaritan woman doubts Jesus is the Messiah (John 4:1-29).

Day 5: Disciples of Jesus doubt his identity (John 6:53-69).

Day 6: Martha doubts Jesus can raise her brother from the dead (John 11:38-44).

Day 7: Re-read Jesus' appearance to Thomas (John 20:24-29).

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of "coming together" is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say "Amen" aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?