

Evidence for the resurrection

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. This is Ross Sian. My name is James. Thanks very much to Ross for leading us through Sunday evening.
- And before the Bible study, we always play a game or a few games together. And there's a game we played, I think a couple of times, not entirely sure what it's called.
- But basically, from what I can remember of the game, Julie would split us into teams and she would then ask us how many of something we think we could do.
- So for example, she would say to the teams, how many grapes could you eat in 30 seconds? Or how many times did you pass a ball between two people in 30 seconds?
- And then the teams would say how much they think you could do. And the other team would say if they could do more or not. And it would kind of go back and forward until one team thought, actually, I can't do more than they've just said.
- [1 : 1 8] Or they think, actually, I don't think you could do as many as you've said. So you would then say, prove it. Prove you can do how many you've just said that you can do.
- I think it's fair to say that we had no issue backing our abilities to do these things really well. But when it came to proving it, often we didn't quite manage to back up our confidence.
- With the game, the big thing is people want to see evidence. It's one thing to say that you can do something. But if you've never done it, then people want to see you back up your words.
- They want that proof. They want to witness you actually doing it. And I think that's fairly true in a lot of areas of our lives. We want evidence for things in order to be convinced that they're true.
- We often don't just take people's word for things, especially when what's at stake is important, when it's a big deal, whether that's maybe in school, in work, within different relationships.
- [2 : 2 9] Evidence matters. And this section, at the end of John chapter 20, it's all about exactly that. Evidence.
- In these verses, we have solid evidence, convincing evidence, that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. And I'm convinced that these verses are here before us to give us confidence in the resurrection of Christ.
- To give us confidence that Jesus, he not only died in the place of sinners, but that three days later, he rose triumphantly over death, defeating death.
- See, this passage, it's not just a historical record. It's not just an interesting story. It's the living God giving us evidence, sufficient evidence, to believe.
- That is why John has written this down. Some people, perhaps some of us even sitting here this morning, think that Christianity is about trusting in something.
- [3 : 3 8] That there isn't really any evidence for. A lot of people, they speak about Christianity and they'll say, they just can't believe it because there's no evidence.

They want some kind of proof. One of my friends, who's not a Christian, still good friends today, him and I, we've regularly discussed faith.

and he would always emphasize how he just can't believe in something that there's no proof for. He would say, it's crazy that I can believe in something that there's no evidence to back up.

Maybe you've said that yourself before. Maybe you, this morning, require more proof or evidence to believe. And so if that is you this morning, then I would encourage you to pay close attention to these verses with an open mind.

I'm sure there's also some of us here who struggle, who do believe, but who struggle with assurance about what we believe. Those of us perhaps go through periods of doubt.

[4 : 46] In fact, I think we probably all fall into that category. We might question what we've been told. We might wrestle with difficult parts of our faith. And so these verses, I think, are here to encourage us as believers to have a greater confidence in the truth of the resurrection.

If you wrestle with doubts, if you struggle with assurance, then I'd also encourage you to pay close attention this morning to these verses, to these words that John has recorded for us that doubt's not something to be ashamed of.

It's part of our faith. But in the midst of our doubts, we aren't to focus on our own feelings or our own thoughts or even on the doubts themselves. We're to look to where the truth is to be found, to where the evidence is.

That's a brief introduction to these verses. It gives you an idea of where we're going this morning. We're going to work through the verses just under two main headings.

We're going to think firstly about doubt and then secondly about evidence. So firstly, the doubt that Thomas had.

[6 : 03] This is a passage that most people will be fairly familiar with. Even if you were new to church, you've probably heard someone say to someone else when they're being skeptical about something, don't be such a doubting Thomas or something along those lines.

In my experience, Christians and non-Christians alike often have a lot of sympathy for Thomas in these verses. We can often feel like actually we get his point.

We understand where it is that he's coming from. We think his doubt is maybe justified. Let's suppose we put ourselves in his shoes.

We might respond in the same manner. If someone in my group of friends had died and then I turned up and all my other friends said, James, great news.

He's actually alive again. He's come back to life. We all saw him but you weren't here. Straight away, I'm doubting what they've claimed.

[7 : 12] I'm calling them out for talking nonsense. I think that way of thinking we often apply that same way of thinking to this account in John's Gospel but it's entirely different.

Thomas had witnessed Jesus' ministry. Thomas had witnessed Jesus perform many miracles. Thomas knew, perhaps witnessed, Jesus bringing others back from the dead.

He heard him say time and again that he would die but that he would rise again. He knew that he was divine.

He had witnessed it. He had seen it. It wasn't just that Jesus was a normal guy. Thomas knew him, knew his claims and he trusted the disciples and yet he still doubted.

But again, we can kind of see Thomas' point, the struggle. We know what it's like to walk into a room and someone say, you won't believe what you missed. There's a feeling of being left out and involved there that I think feeds into his doubt, causing him to feel sceptical, causing him to want to see for himself.

[8 : 30] He wants to be directly involved. We kind of get that. We kind of understand that to a certain extent and I think that's then why he responds to the claims of the other disciples by laying out his own demands.

He says, okay, I hear what you're saying but I'm struggling to believe what you're saying. So how about this? How about I'll believe if I get to see him.

I'll believe if I get to touch his wounds. Otherwise, I will never believe. Again, that's maybe a response that we sympathize with.

It's maybe a response that we can understand to the way that you might expect someone to respond in this situation. Of course, this was almost 2,000 years ago but the way in which he responded people would respond similarly today.

It's not an unusual response today. Think of when you ask someone what will it take for you to believe in God, to trust in Christ's death and his resurrection.

[9 : 43] They might not say the specifics of the demands that we see here from Thomas. There'll be slightly different demands but people will make demands of God and they'll say if he doesn't fulfill these demands, if he doesn't do what I've asked, then I'll never believe.

They might say if God just reveals himself directly to me, then I'll believe. If God just ends poverty, then I'll believe.

If he brings about world peace, I'll believe. They'll say, I'm being reasonable. I've put the ball on his court. I want to believe but I'll only believe if he meets my demands.

Perhaps you're sat here today and you've made your own demands that God needs to meet in order for you to believe. Maybe you're putting your arm around Thomas and you're saying, I'm with you, Thomas.

This God, he needs to prove himself to us. We need evidence. We can't just believe. It's hard for me to know where I guess everyone's minds are at with Thomas.

[10 : 58] There's probably a mix of thoughts towards him. Some of us are probably thinking that we are with him. His doubt is reasonable. It's sensible. Whereas some others are probably thinking actually it's unreasonable.

Thomas has got this wrong. And I think I'd be in the second camp. Thomas has got this wrong. He's not responding. He's not responding.

He's not responding. You see, those of us who are perhaps on team Thomas, we're disregarding the evidence that he has been given. We're claiming that the evidence he has is insufficient.

But is it really insufficient? I think we often fail to realize that Thomas already had access to powerful evidence.

Sometimes I think we can do the same. We can set the bar impossibly high for belief. Ignoring the evidence that is right there in front of us.

[12 : 02] So that's the doubt from Thomas. Take us nicely into our second point. So the doubt that Thomas had and now we're going to move on and think about the evidence that he had.

So the doubt Thomas had in the resurrection which was really the very heart, the very center of the Christian faith, something that we can't negotiate, believing in, fundamental. We've seen that perhaps his doubts were understandable to an extent that maybe they make sense.

So secondly, we're going to consider the evidence that Thomas had and we're going to see in this point that actually we have the same evidence which is entirely sufficient for leading us to trust in Christ and in his resurrection.

So what evidence did Thomas have? Well, for starters, he had the testimony of the other disciples. These weren't strangers or unreliable sources.

These men were probably his closest friends. These were men that he had spent the last three years of his life with, traveling with, eating with, learning with, witnessing the ministry of Jesus with.

[13 : 21] If anyone's words should carry weight, surely it's theirs. Surely it's those who bore eyewitness to what had happened to the resurrection of Christ.

And yet he dismissed these men. He dismissed their claims. He demanded something more. He demanded something physical, something more tangible.

He said, unless I see, unless I touch, I will never believe. Again, we can relate to that as humans.

sometimes we want hard proof. We want things to fit perfectly in our own understanding. We want proof on our terms. And Jesus, actually, in his kindness, in his grace, eight days later, he appears again.

This time, Thomas is there. And Jesus, he doesn't scold him, doesn't rebuke him harshly. instead, in his grace, he invites Thomas to do exactly what he asked for.

[14 : 34] He says, put your finger here, see my hands, reach out your hand, put it into my side. He says, stop doubting and believe.

And what is Thomas' response? Does he take Jesus up on his offer? Does he rejoice that his demands are met and follow through on what he said he had to do?

No, he doesn't. He's completely overwhelmed as he gazes at the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. He realizes how foolish he was to doubt those closest to him.

And he cries out, he says, my Lord and my God. My Lord and my God. It's one of the clearest and strongest declarations of Christ's divinity in the whole of John's gospel.

And it's a total transformation in just a few verses from doubting the resurrection to this incredible confession as his Lord and his God stands before him in the flesh.

[15 : 46] Jesus, he meets Thomas in his doubt. I think he shows us in that moment that God doesn't reject our questions, doesn't reject our doubts.

Instead, he patiently meets us where we are and he invites us to bring our doubts and questions, to trust in him. Of course, for most people, their particular demands of God, they're not going to be met.

God isn't a performing monkey who we just make demands to, who we say to him to jump and he'll inquire to us how high. It's not how it works with the living God.

God says to us in his word, he's given us sufficient evidence for people to investigate for themselves. One of my younger brothers I called Ali, he loves football.

Imagine if I went around to see Ali and I said to him, Ali, you're not going to believe this, but I've just seen Lionel Messi, which is a pretty famous footballer in case you're unaware, and he's on the high street in Preston Pants.

[17 : 00] He's signing autographs along there. Could you imagine if Ali responded to me saying, okay, James, I'll tell you what, if you go and get Lionel Messi to drive round here to knock the door, to shake my hand, to sign my t-shirt and tell me how handsome I am, then I'll believe you.

Of course that's not going to be his reply. If I come round and tell him that and I'm sincere about it, he's going to go and investigate that for himself. He's going to consider the evidence, he's going to look into it for himself, he's not going to make some crazy demands for everything to work out perfectly and come to him.

He's going to get in his car and he's going to drive to the high street. He's going to look for himself. That's the response that should be given.

Thomas should have considered that he was receiving eyewitness testimony from reliable sources. And for us today, when people tell us they need evidence, our response ought to be don't make demands of the living God, investigate the evidence the living God has given to you already in his word, which was written down by eyewitnesses.

The Bible is filled with accounts from people who saw Jesus alive after the resurrection. It's not just a story passed on, it's based on real eyewitness testimony that's been carefully preserved.

[18 : 36] saved. And here's the key verse in these verses. Jesus says, because you have seen me, you have believed.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed. He says, blessed are those who have come face to face with the evidence written down.

those who have heard the good news and those who have trusted in it, who have investigated for themselves and come to realize Jesus is the Christ, that he was crucified, but that he rose from the dead.

We've not seen Jesus in the flesh. We've not touched his hands or put our hands in his side. But Jesus says to us, we're not second-rate Christians.

We're not at a disadvantage. He says we're blessed. Those who have not seen and yet have believed are blessed.

[19 : 43] I think that's a powerful encouragement to all of us. We don't need to see Jesus physically to have a strong faith based on evidence.

And so what is our evidence today? Well, of course, it's the written word of God. That's how John ends this chapter. We read the closing verses of the chapter.

He says, 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.

That's known as John's purpose statement. It's the very reason he, as an eyewitness, wrote down all of these things.

And actually, when you read through John's account of the gospel from start to end and you keep that purpose statement in mind, it's incredible to see the way in which each section is clearly there, clearly written down to help us believe, to help us see the evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, in whose name alone we can have life.

[21 : 15] And although it is the purpose statement for the whole of his account, it's been recorded, I think, at this specific point, intentionally. John has allowed us here to come face to face with the doubt of Thomas.

And he has made clear that the testimony of the eyewitnesses is sufficient. And so by placing this purpose statement here, he's telling us that he's used Thomas as an example of how not to respond.

He's telling us, don't respond like Thomas, making demands of the living God. He's saying, look at the evidence.

See Christ for who he really is, for all that he's done, and let that lead us to enjoy life in all its fullness. You see, Thomas, in this account, he received the evidence from the eyewitnesses through spoken word.

We receive that same testimony, that same evidence about the truth by written word. John is saying, I've written these things down, not just as historical facts, but so that you may believe, and as you believe, may enjoy life in all its fullness.

[22 : 38] That's our evidence today. But there's more than that, isn't there? Yes, we have the eyewitnesses, we have God's word, which these writers were carried along by the Holy Spirit to write down, to record.

But we also have the evidence, even before us this morning, of transformed lives, those sitting beside us, who have been taken from death to life, whose lives we can see shaped by the gospel, becoming more and more shaped by it.

We have the evidence in God's word of the fulfilled prophecies through Christ's life, his death, his resurrection. We see the power of the resurrection, not just in this room before us, but you see it throughout history, the way that Christ's resurrection and faith in it has transformed millions of people.

When people believe, they themselves, they start to bear witness to the truth through their own lives as they seek to live for Christ. And so, this is what you draw to a close.

If you're here this morning, you find yourself full of questions, unsure, wanting more, you're not alone, I don't think, in that, wanting more evidence, specific evidence, demands met.

[24 : 02] But don't stay stuck in that frame of mind. Look at the evidence. Don't demand things to come to you. consider the risen Christ.

Don't sit there making demands of God. Investigate for yourself. Don't say you will believe if God does X, Y, and Z as you sit on your backside doing nothing.

God has revealed all that you need to believe in his word. God has given the evidence that is required. Investigate it. Read through the Gospels.

Get a friend who's a Christian. Read through it together. And see for yourself that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. And if you're here this morning as a believer who is struggling with doubt, then let these words encourage you.

Let yourself be reminded that our faith is not a blind faith, but it is built upon truth, seen through generations, built upon evidence found in scripture.

[25 : 12] These men saw the Lord Jesus Christ die. They saw the Lord Jesus Christ alive after that. They told people.

They wrote it down as the Holy Spirit carried them along. And many of them were killed, martyred, because they believed in Christ and in his resurrection, and because they were telling people about them.

If they had fabricated any of this, they would never have willingly died for a lie. They would have renounced their claims. They would have kept everything to themselves.

They would have stopped talking nonsense. But they never. They willingly died because they knew it was true. They saw it, and they wrote it down. And they died for it because they knew it was so important.

that gives us assurance that it is true. That adds to the evidence that it is true. And so ultimately, this passage is asking us today, this morning, how do we respond?

[26 : 21] Like Thomas? It says to us, here is the evidence. Here is what is true. through faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, there is forgiveness available for all people.

And what is required of us to have that forgiveness, to have that new life, well, it is to believe. Jesus is alive.

Death has been defeated, and new life is now being offered to us. John says to us, in these verses, stop doubting, look at the evidence, and instead, exclaim with Thomas, my Lord and my God.

Let's pray together. Let's pray. Father, God, we give you thanks for John's account of the gospel.

We give you thanks for those who were able to bear witness to what they saw. Thank you for John especially, and for writing down this amazing truth that Jesus Christ did rise from the dead, that he saw him with his own eyes.

[27 : 40] I mean, thank you so much that he did not keep that amazing news to himself, but him and the other disciples went around telling people, went around writing it down, so that those who did not get to see the risen Lord Jesus could read of his resurrection and could place his trust in him and enjoy life in his name.

I pray you'd help us to have confidence in that, help us in the midst of doubts to remember that this is true. Help us not to listen to our thoughts and feelings, but to remember that your word is true, that it is completely trustworthy and it is completely sufficient for leading us to faith in the Lord Jesus.

I pray you'd continue to give us confidence in that and help us as we seek to point others to the truth, which is not a blind faith, but is a faith based on evidence and a faith that offers life in all its fullness.

We thank you for that in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.