

The Message of Easter: The Only Currency You can Trust in the Real Crisis to Come

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[0 : 00] Welcome to our Easter Sunday morning service. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early while it was still dark and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, they have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid him.

So Peter went out with the other disciple and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloth lying there, but he did not go in. And Simon Peter came following him and went into the tomb.

He saw the linen cloth lying there and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in.

[1 : 09] And he saw and believed. For as yet, they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead. And then the disciples went back to their homes.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, Peace be with you. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending 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 anyone, they are forgiven. If you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld. Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

[2 : 22] So the other disciples told him, We have seen the Lord. But he said to them, Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again. And Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them.

And said, Peace be with you. And then he said to Thomas, Put your finger here, and see my hands, and put your hand placed into my side.

Do not disbelieve, but believe. And Thomas answered him, My Lord and my God. And Jesus said to him, You have believed because you have seen me.

Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book.

[3 : 39] 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.

Amen. And may God bless his word. Do open your Bibles with me at John chapter 20. And I want to look at this morning, really the last section of this chapter, all about Thomas.

I want to speak about the currency of Christianity. The current crisis, I think, has highlighted, once again, just how vital in life is the issue of trust.

Can we trust, for example, a government's figures for its COVID infections? Well, very few, I think, believe anything about the statistics coming out of Iran, or out of China, for example.

Apparently, the UK government thinks that the Chinese have hidden so many of their cases.

Actually, the real infection rate is perhaps 40 times as many as they've admitted. Because they

don't trust the Chinese Communist Party on that.

[4 : 56] They do seem to trust them to build our mobile phone networks, although perhaps that will change given the current circumstances. But trust, belief in a person or in a government's testimony is crucial.

And you see the same in the current gyrations that are happening in the world financial markets. Because finance is all based on trust. I once heard a definition of money as being trust inscribed. Apparently, the very first money issued was on clay tablets promising to pay up grain at harvest time. And I suppose today that's what we would call a futures contract.

And you'll only accept that, won't you, if you trust your counterparty to be good for the grain, not if you don't trust them. Will that tablet, will that currency actually be any good in exchange for the goods that you're going to need in the future?

That's why today it's the currency markets and the bond markets that really actually tell you what's going on in the world, whether governments really can be trusted or not to do what they say they're going to do in terms of their financial management of the economy and their currencies.

[6 : 11] And with all the billions, with all the trillions indeed that are being promised in bailouts all over the place today, of course, that's a huge issue. Bond traders, currency traders, aren't fools.

They're allocating their capital to protect it from losses. And so they're going to do everything they can to look at the real evidence in a very hard-headed and realistic way, in a skeptical way.

They won't just believe everything that a government tells them. They'll look at their actions, both in the present and in the past. And they'll pass judgment on which ones they think they can put their trust in and believe, whether they can believe a sovereign government's financial prudence, its fiscal prudence.

That's why bond traders and the likes will flock to buy the bonds issued by the German government, for example, and not the Italian government or the Greek government or the Portuguese government, because they trust the German government to return their money, much more so than they trust the others.

That's why in a crisis all the world over, people flock to hold United States dollars, not Zimbabwe dollars, because they trust that the U.S. dollar will be worth something in a year or two's time, whereas the Zimbabwe dollar will probably not be worth a cent.

[7 : 29] It's all a matter of faith. It's all a matter of trust, based on hard evidence that can be weighed up and balanced and acted upon. And I'm sure you're hoping that the people who are running your pension fund are those who are seeking to act on the basis of what is credible, not on what is credulous.

That they're putting their faith and their trust in the kind of investments for your future that are not just a leap in the dark and a wild gamble, but something that are based on observable reality and evidence from people with sound judgment, with credibility.

That's the key question for anyone looking to ensure that they're left comfortable in retirement, not in absolute penury. But how much more important then to know which currency and which investment you can really trust for a far greater crisis that is surely coming to engulf this world, even than the current epidemic.

That crisis, of course, is the coming judgment of God. And the stakes are not just about comfort or poverty and retirement, but are about life and death, about heaven and hell, not just for a time, but for all eternity.

You see, the great question that Easter poses for every human being is simply this. Do you believe, do you trust, the currency of the Christian gospel?

[9 : 03] Because it's the trust inscribed in that message which will surely prove to be the only currency in this whole world that you can trust in that crisis to come.

That is what Christian people believe. And our contention as the Christian church is that our Christian faith is not a leap into the dark, a wild gamble.

It's not the spiritual equivalent of the Zimbabwe dollar. Far from it. It is, in fact, what solid gold alone is to every paper currency in this world.

It's trust in something solid and tangible and lasting and utterly real which can never be devalued, can never be rendered utterly worthless. Because behind its promise is not the Bank of England or the European Central Bank or the Federal Reserve or the United States.

Behind its promise is Almighty God Himself. So I want to talk on this Easter Sunday morning about the currency of Christianity, about the message of the risen Jesus Christ.

[10:16] and the trust inscribed in the words of witness that those who, from the very beginning, claimed to testify to the clear and credible reality of His bodily resurrection from the dead.

And surely, if we want to be wise investors in life, we'll want to investigate, we'll want to examine the evidence with all of our faculties in search of our lasting profit in life.

When the stakes are so high, there's absolutely no place, is there, for a leap of faith based on just a hunch, on a gut feeling, on intuition. No, no, no. But surely, at the same time, there can be no place for a closed-minded intransigence, a prejudice, a refusal even to consider being persuadable by what is, in fact, compelling truth, if that truth can be demonstrated.

Because if the currency of Christianity is the only real store of value for eternity, what a calamity it would be if you had been given the chance to invest freely but had refused to do so simply because you'd never even bother to take seriously the evidence that other people tried to set before you and persuade you with.

Well, that's what nearly happened to the great skeptic Thomas, were it not for God's great grace and generosity to him. But Thomas' story is preserved for us as a warning and also as an encouragement to us.

[11:58] So I want to look at it carefully with you this Easter morning. First of all, look at verses 24 and 25 of John's Gospel chapter 20 where we see actually what's a very common situation indeed because what's pictured for us here is the great cynic, a skeptic who rejects the evidence about the risen Jesus Christ.

I will never believe, says Thomas. Verse 24, Thomas, one of the twelve called the twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, we have seen the Lord.

But he said to them, unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails and place my finger into the mark of the nails and place my hand into his sight, I will never believe.

Now remember everything we've already read in this chapter. The whole account is all about evidence. Evidence that's clear, that's reliably witnessed, that's passed on by trustworthy sources, known sources.

Look back at the first paragraph, verses 1 to 10, where we have the evidence of these sprinting fishermen. Peter and John, two of Jesus' closest disciples, they ran to the tomb, remember.

[13:20] John outran Peter, but he didn't go in to the tomb, but Peter did straight away. And verse 6 says, he saw the evidence of the grave clothes, all still in place, untouched, and yet the body gone from inside them.

And then the other disciple, John, verse 8, goes in, and he saw and believed. Notice verse 9. Why did they believe? Well, not actually because they had learned from the scriptures that the resurrection must be expected.

No, we're told they didn't grasp that yet. But they believed the evidence of their own eyes.

Something they didn't expect to see at all, but something they couldn't actually deny.

And then verses 11 to 18, we have the evidence of sorrowing Mary. Mary's weeping. Clearly, she is not looking for a living Jesus. She's looking for a dead Jesus.

She's looking, verse 15, for a body. But then, she hears his real voice and sees him with her own eyes and clings onto him so that Jesus has to peel her off.

[14:28] And so, her evidence, verse 18, is, I have seen the Lord and I've heard his words. And then, verse 19, there's more evidence, the testimony of these scared disciples.

They're all together. All of them heard his voice. All of them see his hands, his feet, his side. They feel the very breath of his mouth. And so, later on, when Thomas appears in verse 25, they can say with absolute certainty, we've all seen the Lord.

And Thomas says to them, do you think I came up with a colliding of a banana boat? Don't be ridiculous. Dead people do not rise. Skepticism about the resurrection didn't begin with people like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens and so on.

You listen to them and others like them today, you'd think that everybody who didn't share their view must be some kind of simpleton, some sort of person who believes in anything like flying chocolate teapots.

As though the resurrection of the dead was just one more crazy thing to believe before breakfast.

But, friends, that is nonsense. The whole point of these accounts in the Gospels is to remind us that

resurrection has always been very, very hard to believe in.

[15 : 54] And it was only believed in in the beginning on the basis of utterly convincing evidence. Evidence that was otherwise irrefutable. And at this point, you see, Thomas was a skeptic.

He was having none of it. Unless I see, he says, I will never believe. Well, we can understand that. Of course we can. We'd have probably been exactly the same as him.

But just think for a minute how things would be if we applied that rule to absolutely everything in life. It would mean, wouldn't it, that we would never actually trust anything that's vouched for by anybody else.

However trustworthy they were, unless we have actually seen it for ourselves. we would never take anything at all on trust. Friends, the entire world would stop going around if that were the case. Couldn't have money for a start, could we? Because money is trust inscribed. Money is just trusting the word of somebody that we can't see. So trade and commerce and most human interaction would grind to a halt if we all said I will never believe.

[17 : 11] That's what happened of course back in the credit crunch. Remember, governments and banks would no longer believe the words and the promises of others about their assets and so on and so they wouldn't lend to each other.

The whole world started doing a Thomas saying, only when I've actually seen your capital myself will I believe. And the whole world system broke down. Everything broke down. It was a credit crunch.

Credit is the word that comes from the Latin credere to believe. It was a trust crisis. Everybody said, I do not believe anymore that you're good for what you promise.

Well, there was good reason for that of course because many of those promises turned out not to be true. Many of those assets were utterly toxic. And perhaps with this current crisis that we're in things will prove to be even worse.

Who knows? That's just one example, isn't it, of how the whole of life depends on being able to believe the word and witness of other people based on a reasonable examination of the facts, based on the reliability and the history of the witnesses.

[18 : 21] That's how we decide the truth in so many ways in life. Imagine in a court of law hearing a case on the basis of testimony.

That's what happens. Think of a murder case, for example, where you have a jury listening to testimony and witness after witness stands before the jury and says, yes, I saw that man killing that person.

But imagine if the jury came back in and said, well, Your Honor, unless we see it with our own eyes, we will never believe that this man killed this other. It's preposterous, isn't it? The whole justice system would collapse if that was how we thought.

Well, think about trying to order something over the internet or over the phone. You go onto the Amazon website, you see something you want, so you read the description, you look at the pictures, and probably you read some of the customer reviews.

You don't usually phone up Amazon and say, well, I want to see it with my own eyes and touch it with my own hands before I'm going to order it. They'd say to you, well, sorry, we can't do that. You might, if you're really doubting, you might phone a friend who you know has bought that very item and you say to them, well, what do you think of it?

[19 : 35] And your friend says, well, yes, it's terrific, it's excellent, it's exactly as it's described and it's brilliant. I thoroughly encourage you to buy it. Well, you'll say to yourself, yeah, well, I trust my friend, so I will buy it.

And then when you do decide to buy it from Amazon, Amazon doesn't say to you, well, I'm sorry, I've got to actually see the cash in my own hand before I'm going to send this out to you. In fact, not only have I got to see the cash, but we've actually got to have gone out and used that cash to buy something else so we know that really is valuable before we send anything to you.

Of course not. You give them your credit card, your trust card, your believe in me card, and you believe that Amazon are going to fulfill your order and send it to you.

And they believe that that card company will in the end pay the funds to them because the card provider believes that you will pay the card provider because before they even gave you the card, they've investigated the evidence about you and put their trust in you as being good to pay the bills.

The whole transaction in every part is based on trust. Trust in a word and in testimony that's credible, that's believable.

[20 : 53] Not credulous, but credible. Because a card provider will only give you a card, won't it, if it's checked the evidence of your credit score and so on. And that's how the world works.

We trust based on a credit score, based on trustworthiness. And here Thomas receives first-hand, reliable, utterly consistent evidence from people that he knew and he knew he could trust and he should have trusted and yet he refused to believe.

Now, is that reasonable? Is that a wise way to live? Well, it's possible, I suppose, to live your life like that, isn't it?

To never trust anybody, never trust anything. anything. But that's a symptom of a disordered life, of a damaged life, not of a healthy life, not a balanced one.

If you live like that, you'll never ever have any friends, will you? Just in case they might let you down. You'll refuse ever to marry anybody, just in case you might in fact be betrayed.

[22 : 09] You'll never want to have children, just in case they grow up and they disappoint you. You can't trust anyone except for your own self. That's a very, very sad way to live.

Of course, it's good to be honestly skeptical, to demand good evidence, to examine evidence, to only commit to something that's true, not something that's false.

But it's quite different. In fact, it's pathologically foolish to close your mind completely, to begin always with a presupposition that some things are impossible and couldn't ever be true, no matter what the evidence is for it, no matter who it is, who's bearing testimony about it.

If you get an email from somebody you've never heard of, from Nigeria, promising you a million pounds from an unknown benefactor, well, that's one thing, isn't it? You put that straight in your junk mail.

But if you get a genuine letter in the post from a Glasgow solicitors firm that you know of, telling you that actually you've been left a legacy from a relative who you did know, well, that's a very different kind of message, isn't it?

[23 : 28] You'd be an idiot to throw that in the bin, even if it's very unexpected, even if it surprises you, even if you find yourself saying, goodness, I can't believe that. That old aunt of mine couldn't stand me, and actually I couldn't stand her either.

But sometimes strange things happen. Sometimes people's skepticism is roundly rebuffed by very solid evidence. And that is exactly what happened here to Thomas, as we'll see in a minute.

We'll come back with me to John chapter 20, and look at verses 26 and 27, where we witness a great confrontation. The skeptic Thomas now is rebuked by the evidence of the risen Jesus.

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood with them and said, peace be with you. And then he said to Thomas, put your finger here and see my hands and put your hand and place it in my side.

Do not disbelieve, but believe. Well, it's exactly a week later, the eighth day. The Jews calculated their days inclusively.

[24 : 51] So it was the following Sunday night. And they're still meeting together behind closed doors. Locked doors, we're told. They weren't on lockdown, but they were afraid. And suddenly, in the middle, Jesus appears.

I wonder what the expression was on Thomas' face. I wonder if you've ever been in the position where perhaps you've disbelieved somebody wrongly. And you've ended up being shown up and had real egg on your face.

You know, the sort of thing. Maybe you're a man and maybe you've made a point at some point of asking your wife particularly to wash and iron your best shirt because you've got a very important meeting to go to.

And you've asked her to do that. So when you come back in, it's all ready and you can get changed and you can go out. And anyway, you rush in and you want to get changed and you go and you can't find your shirt in the drawer.

And so you go out and you see that the washing machine is still on and there are shirts going around and around in the washing machine. And so you suddenly assume that your wife has just totally ignored you and not done that.

[26 : 00] You stomp off in a very foul mood ranting about the unreliability of women and wives in particular. And then maybe you see your wife as you're going up the stairs and you confront her and

say, couldn't you even do that one thing that I asked you to do?

You know how important this meeting is for me. You stomp off into your bedroom to look for another shirt. And then you just see laid out on your bed not only that beautifully ironed best shirt but in fact your tie and your cufflinks and your suit and your beautifully polished shoes all there ready for you. And you're overcome by a little bit of sheepishness and then really quite a lot of shame at your behavior. And you realize just how irrational your unbelief in your wife had been.

How wrong, how unworthy it was to question and to cast aspersions on that wonderful wife that you don't deserve. Well obviously I've never had an experience like that but perhaps that's something that some of you may have had and I could imagine it happening.

And I guess poor Thomas felt something like that didn't he? Suddenly a great wave of shame. Perhaps feeling sick to the very pit of his stomach.

[27 : 10] You can imagine it when Jesus appears and says peace and no doubt everybody leapt for joy. Well Thomas sort of gasped in silence.

rebuked by his own words. Exposed by his own unbelief in Jesus' words. Jesus says here. Here's my hand.

Here's my side Thomas. Isn't that what you wanted to see? Don't disbelieve. Believe. Notice that Jesus does not call Thomas a doubter as we tend to do.

He calls him a rank unbeliever. He is rebuking Thomas just as he rebuked the disciples in Luke chapter 24 on the road to Emmaus. Do you remember?

For their refusal to believe the words of scripture that were so clear. He is rebuking Thomas for refusing to believe evidence that is reliable, that is trustworthy, that is first hand and that should have been believed.

[28 : 16] It's not healthy doubt. Everybody has doubts, of course. But this is a culpable rejection of the truth that Thomas exhibits.

It's unbelief, says Jesus. And so it's wicked. But Jesus is very merciful to Thomas.

He does give him sight with his own eyes of his risen body, touch with his own hands of the reality of the life that is before him.

And Thomas sees that he who once was dead now is alive. Come back once more to John chapter 20 and look now at verse 28.

which shows us at last the great confession. The skeptic Thomas now rejoicing in the evidence of the risen Jesus. And Thomas gives an outright confession not only of Christ's resurrection but of his deity.

[29 : 27] My Lord and my God. And these words really are the high point of the whole of the gospel of John. The great cynic has become the great confessor.

The greatest witness of them all. Just as later of course the great persecutor Saul of Tarsus became the great preacher and the greatest missionary of them all.

That's Paul the apostle when he likewise saw the risen Lord Jesus Christ. And many another great opponent, great skeptic has all through history similarly become a great confessor in Christ when they've come to terms with the evidence of the risen Jesus from Augustine way back in the fourth century to many even in our own church fellowship right here today.

What's the point of John recording all of these things for us in this resurrection chapter? Well he tells us in verses 29 to 31 because Thomas becomes our teacher.

He becomes the one who warns us to pay heed and not to scorn real and credible evidence about the truth of Jesus Christ. You've believed, Jesus says to Thomas, because you have seen me.

[30 : 50] And that's the whole point of this whole chapter. It was indeed those who saw clear irrefutable evidence who believed.

it was evidence that convinced even the most hardened and cynical of skeptics like Thomas. But it convinced them about the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But Jesus also says, you see, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. What does he mean? Well, it's very clear from the next two verses which sum up, in fact, John's whole purpose in writing this gospel.

Verse 31, all these things, this testimony, he says, is written so that you, that is all of you who hear, all of us who read these words, so that we may believe and find life in Jesus' name.

Jesus was not going to remain bodily on earth for very much longer. He'd said back in verse 17 to Mary, I am ascending to my Father.

[31 : 53] So inevitably then, it would be impossible for anyone else to believe the truth about him if they took the Thomas approach. If they said, only if I see with my own eyes will I believe.

Jesus is saying, no, that's going to be impossible until, of course, the day when I return and every eye will see me. But then, of course, it's far too late.

And that day is coming for the whole world. Jesus said that, if you go back to John chapter 5, very clearly. And on that day, he says, only those who have believed now through the hearing of his words, through the testimony of the apostles' witness, only they shall be raised to eternal life.

But those who have refused, those who would not trust in those trustworthy words, they will rise up on that day to judgment. Because these words of Jesus and these words of the apostles, firsthand, eyewitness, testimony to Jesus, they are the legal tender of salvation.

They are the currency of eternal life, which is backed by the promise of Almighty God himself. In the upper room, do you remember, Jesus prayed sovereignly for all of his own.

[33 : 16] Not just his first followers, he says, but for all who will believe in me through their word. John 17, verse 20. You are to bear witness, he said to the twelve.

And whoever receives the one that I send, says Jesus, receives me. And likewise, he means everyone who rejects and disbelieves and does not trust the word of the one he sends.

well, they reject and they disbelieve and distrust in Jesus himself. If you short sell a country's currency, as so famously George Soros did to the pound back in 1992, if you do that, you're heaping scorn on that country, on that government, on its sovereignty, on its strength, on its competence.

You're giving a slap in the face, in a very concrete expression of your distrust, your disbelief, in that country's power. And in the same way, friends, if you short sell the currency of Christ in the promise of his gospel, you are heaping scorn, you're heaping rejection, on the sovereign Lord of glory himself.

You can't have the life of God, the life that God promises in his gospel, the resurrection life from the dead, beyond the grave, shared with Jesus.

[34 : 53] You can't have that if you reject the gospel of God, the word of trust that God has given. If you reject his currency, you reject him who backs that currency.

Because the currency of the gospel, like all currency, is a matter of belief, belief in the person, the institution, the one who lies behind that currency as its guarantor.

The Christian gospel is trust inscribed. It's the genuine first-hand testimony of the apostles who were with Jesus from the very beginning, who saw with their own eyes his risen body, and told it to the world.

Listen to how John puts it later on as he writes in his first letter. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life.

This life was made manifest, and we have seen it and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father, and which was made manifest to us.

[36 : 16] That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Thomas rejected out of hand what was later proved to have been true, and proved him to have been very, very wrong indeed.

Don't be like Thomas, is what Jesus is saying here. You're blessed, and you will be blessed, if you believe what he heard, and should have believed.

Don't say like him, I'll never believe. It's amazing how many people, how many intelligent people do say that. Don't do that, is what John's gospel is telling us.

Now examine the evidence. Take time to weigh it all up. Ask questions. What is there possibly for you to lose? Join us next week in our live stream and hear more.

[37 : 32] No one's trying to brainwash you. We're not desperate in the Christian church, not at all. We are supremely confident in our currency because it is the word of trust inscribed by God himself.

And we want you to examine it freely. We want you to evaluate it for yourself so that you don't lose out. So keep tuning in. Come to Christianity Explored online this evening at half past seven.

Examine the evidence in Mark's gospel similar to John's. Ask questions. Read the Bible for yourself with an open mind, not with a closed mind. Be open enough to pray.

Lord God, if you are real and if you're risen, then open my eyes, open my mind, so that I too, who was once a skeptic, might become, like Thomas, a great confessor of Jesus Christ as Lord and God.

Ultimately, you see, the only way to see what a currency is really worth is to take it in your hands and actually try it out, isn't it? Well, says John here in verse 31 of chapter 20, that's what this gospel currency is for.

[38 : 54] All of this is written, he says, it's inscribed in trust, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you might have life in his name.

And may that be so for everyone who hears these words and that promise this Easter day. Amen.