

Thomas: The Sceptic Who Believes

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 April 2021

Preacher: Paul Brennan

[0 : 00] Well, we've been looking this Easter weekend at John's Gospel and John's witness to the cross of Christ and to the empty tomb, the resurrection. We're going to turn once again this evening to John chapter 20.

And in a few minutes, Paul is going to come and speak to us from these last verses of John chapter 20. We're reading perhaps a familiar story beginning at verse 24 that tells us of Thomas who came late to the party, as it were.

He wasn't there when Jesus appeared to the other 11 disciples and took some convincing indeed. We're going to read his story beginning at verse 24.

Now Thomas, one of the 12, called the twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, we've 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.

[1 : 08] 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. Put out your hand, place it in my sight.

Do not disbelieve, but believe. And Thomas answered him, my Lord and my God. And Jesus said to him, you believe because you've seen me?

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet who have believed. Amen. May God bless to us his word.

Well, if you have your Bibles, do please turn to John chapter 20. And we're going to think about these verses that Willie read for us just a moment ago.

[2 : 19] So John chapter 20 and reading there from verse 24. Now I wonder what it would take for you to put your trust in a big new idea.

An idea with potentially life-changing implications. That is exactly what Thomas is confronted with in this story, this true story this evening.

He is given news that at first seems too wonderful, too big to possibly be true. But although a skeptic at first, his skepticism gives way to belief and to one of the most profound confessions of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in the whole New Testament.

Thomas, the skeptic who believes. That's our story this evening. Now I kind of give you an illustration. And before I go any further, let me underline that this is an illustration.

This is not financial advice. Investments do go up as well as down. Now there's a big new idea. And it's been around for a little while. But it's beginning to pick up steam.

[3 : 33] It's certainly getting more and more media attention. And the idea is Bitcoin. Bitcoin. Now for the uninitiated, Bitcoin is a cryptocurrency.

It's a sort of digital thing. I don't really quite know. But it's sort of one of those digital currencies invented in 2008. Now can I introduce you to a man you've probably never heard of and a company that he runs that you've probably never heard of either.

But his name is Michael Saylor. And his company is called MicroStrategy. Now several months ago, he decided, along with his investors, his shareholders, to make the big decision to put all of the company's finances, the whole cash revenue, and put it into Bitcoin.

And he put almost \$500 million into Bitcoin. He then borrowed another billion and put that in Bitcoin as well. Anyway, several months on, that \$1.5 billion investment has now turned into \$5 billion.

I think he's had quite a good year. And he's absolutely sold, as you can imagine, on Bitcoin. And I came across an interview with him.

[4 : 44] And his advice in that interview to anyone listening was to sell everything you have, borrow as much as you can, and buy Bitcoin. The stakes, in his opinion, are that high.

Bitcoin's the future. That's what his view is. Now that's a big claim. And there's a lot at stake. But I, for one, am fairly skeptical about the whole thing.

Before I do anything, I'm going to do some serious research, aren't I? Before I sell my house, I'm going to do some research. Before I can borrow everything I can and put it in Bitcoin, I'm going to look at the evidence.

I wonder what it would take to convince you to sell everything you had and put it in this thing you can't see called Bitcoin. Well, your response and my response to Michael Saylor's Bitcoin pitch is perhaps not a million miles away from Thomas' response to the news that the other disciples share with him.

There in verse 24. He hears this incredible news from his fellow disciples. Look at verse 24 and 25 there.

[5 : 54] Thomas, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, we've seen the Lord. That's pretty incredible news. And here's the first thing we're going to see in our passage this evening.

We see a pessimist who is prepared to examine his skepticism. You see, Thomas, for whatever reason, was not present with the other disciples when Jesus came and revealed himself to them after the resurrection.

That's what we see there in verse 24. Now, Thomas, he was a sort of character who, I guess like many of us, would tend to look on the shadier side of things.

He'd look on the dark side rather than the bright side. He was a natural pessimist. If you look at his other two interactions that are recorded in John's Gospel, he seems to be the sort of chap who is a natural skeptic.

And so his response here in verse 25 to the news that the other disciples have seen the Lord is perhaps not all that surprising. He was a bit of a skeptic.

[7 : 04] Look at what he says in response to this huge claim. Look at the middle of verse 25. He says, The man they'd seen die on a Roman cross was now alive.

Well, that's pretty big news, isn't it? That's a big, big claim. That is the biggest claim you could possibly ever make. Resurrection is not your everyday sort of thing, is it?

This is a big, big claim they're making. And so Thomas is struggling to grapple with what they're saying. He needs evidence.

His was not a closed form of skepticism. He hadn't yet hardened into obstinate and persistent unbelief. No, by the end of this section, he's no longer a skeptic, is he?

By the end, he's a believer proclaiming Jesus as Lord and God. Quite the turnaround. And for the modern day skeptic, the fundamental claim at the heart of the Christian faith that Jesus rose from the dead, that remains a huge claim, doesn't it?

[8 : 44] That is not your everyday sort of thing. Perhaps that's you here this afternoon or tuning in online. This is huge to claim that this man rose from the dead.

How can this possibly be? Well, if that's you, if you're in that position just thinking, this is unbelievable, I cannot get my head around this.

If that's you, then you're in good company. Because there's someone very much like you in John's gospel. His name is Thomas. And so can I ask you to at least be willing to examine your own skepticism and at least be open to consider the evidence.

That was Thomas' stance. Even though it was pretty harsh and pretty pushing it off, he would believe if he saw with his own eyes. He was prepared to believe, but only upon convincing evidence.

And it is evidence, compelling evidence, convincing evidence that John, the writer of this account, provides. And he provides it in abundance.

[9 : 52] It's all over the whole book. Evidence upon evidence, testimony upon testimony of the works and the words of Jesus Christ on his death, but also his resurrection.

John gives evidence in abundance. And so the question is, will you consider the evidence? Will you be willing to have your skepticism challenged in light of the evidence?

That's the first thing that we see in this chapter. A skeptic willing to examine his own skepticism.

Well, we've seen in our passage first, a pessimist prepared to examine his skepticism.

But secondly, we see in this passage, a skeptic willing to follow the evidence into faith in Jesus. While a week passes, Thomas, his words are left hanging in the air for eight days. Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails and place my hand into his side, I'll never believe. Those words are just left hanging for a whole week.

[11:12] And verse 26, eight days later, his disciples were inside again. Thomas, this time, was there. He is with them. And again, Jesus came and stood right in their midst.

And he speaks, peace be with you. And then he turns directly and looks at Thomas and he speaks to him.

And we need to note, before we look any further, just note the wonderful kindness and grace of Jesus here. He didn't have to do this, did he?

He didn't have to show himself again in this way just for Thomas' benefit. He's already met the disciples and told them and showed himself to them. But he does it.

He doesn't berate Thomas. He doesn't belittle him. You see, Jesus knows that we are weak and feeble creatures.

[12:12] He knows Thomas. He knows you and me. And for all who genuinely seek him, for all who genuinely seek answers to their skepticism, Jesus will make himself known.

And that is just what he does for Thomas here. Can you imagine Thomas' face in that moment? It's the definition, isn't it, of a jaw-dropping moment.

For a week, he's perhaps been turning over in his mind the claims that his friends have made.

Jesus can't possibly have risen, can he? Can't possibly be true.

And yet, here he is, right in front of him. Put your finger here, Thomas. See my hands.

Put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe. Thomas' life is turned upside down in a moment.

[13:17] In that instance, all his skepticism evaporates. He's now seen with his own eyes the risen Lord Jesus. And his response is the only appropriate response, isn't it?

Thomas' confession of faith is instantaneous. My Lord and my God. His skepticism gives way to one of the most glorious and joyful confessions of faith you have in the whole gospel.

This is the climax. My Lord and my God. This is who Jesus is. For a whole week or more, he's been mourning the death of Jesus, confused by the testimony of his fellow disciples.

But now, now the light has been given. His eyes are open to see the reality, the glorious reality of the resurrected Jesus. Jesus is Lord and God.

He is the promised Messiah. The Son of God from heaven. It's all true. Everything he's heard those past three years, it's true. The eternal life Jesus promised wasn't some fantasy.

[14:32] Now it was a guarantee. The forgiveness of sins that Jesus promised wasn't just some nice idea. Now it was a reality. Everything Jesus has been saying, everything he's done is true.

Thomas believes. Well, that's all very well, isn't it, for Thomas. He did actually see the risen Lord Jesus with his own two eyes.

That's pretty conclusive evidence, isn't it? To the claim that the disciples made the week before that Jesus is alive, or to see him there before you, that's pretty convincing evidence.

That's all very well for him. But what about you and me? Well, Jesus' response to Thomas is so important for all of us who come after Jesus' ascension, that moment when he returned to be with the Father in heaven.

Look at what Jesus says to Thomas. He says, Have you believed because you've seen me? End of verse 29.

[15:43] Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. For Thomas, it was sight.

Clear, physical sight with his own two eyes that led to faith. But for all who follow, people like you and me, for whom the tangible, physical evidence of the resurrection is just not possible, faith rests on the evidence of those firsthand eyewitnesses.

Eyewitnesses just like Thomas and those disciples, and all the others who saw the risen Lord Jesus. People who did see with their own two eyes, Jesus, risen from the dead. So our faith rests on their testimony.

For us, faith comes not by sight, but it comes from what is heard or read in these accounts of the things that Jesus said and did. That is exactly why John has written this account.

So that there will be solid evidence, solid testimony for those who've come after to believe in Jesus. Look on to the very next couple of verses at the end of this story with Thomas.

[16 : 59] These are the next two verses, verses 30 and 31. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book.

This is a selective account. There's a lot more that could be said, but this is selective. But these, verse 31, these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Do you see why John is writing? Why he's put together this account? He's giving evidence that leads to belief, that leads to life. He gives undisputable testimony about Jesus' words and his works.

Why is he doing that? Why give all this evidence? Well, it's in order to prompt belief. Belief in Jesus, that he is who he says he is, that he is the Son of God. And he appeals to us to respond in faith to all the evidence, all that we've just been reading this morning, this evening.

The response to that testimony is to believe. And that belief leads to life. Life eternal.

[18 : 20] Life in all its fullness. Forgiveness of sin. Life everlasting. That is what's on offer in John's Gospel. That's why he's written.

He's written so that you, us here in Glasgow in 21st century, you that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

And so, given all that is at stake, given the magnitude of the claims that are made here, that Jesus, who died on a Roman cross, rose again, it's a big claim.

Given the magnitude of the claim here, are you willing to consider the evidence? There was too much at stake not to. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is absolutely worth looking into.

It offers you more than you can imagine. You can't not look into it. It offers life for eternity in a new creation, free of all that spoils and causes pain in this life.

[19 : 33] What is on offer is wonderful. It's absolutely worth considering. If you've never done so before, it's absolutely worth looking into.

If that chap, Michael Saylor, is right about Bitcoin, then it's worth looking into, if he's right. But what Jesus offers is infinitely more valuable than that.

It is absolutely worth bringing your skepticism to the table and seeing if your skepticism holds up to the evidence. Consider the evidence that John provides. Why not read all of John's account?

Look at the evidence for yourself. See why Thomas and many, many, many millions after him have been convinced and believed.

Lee Mack, the comedian, he was on Desert Island Discs some time ago. You'll know the premise. You're stuck on a desert island. You can choose a few songs that you'd like to keep you going and you get to pick a book in addition to the Bible.

[20 : 45] The Bibles are given. You have that with you. And he said, I'm glad that you get the Bible because I would read the Bible. I think it's quite odd that people like myself in their 40s quite happy to dismiss the Bible, but I've never read it.

I always think that if an alien came down and you were the only person they met and the alien said to you, what's life about? What's earth about? Tell us everything. And you said, well, there is a book here that purports to tell you everything.

Some people believe it to be true. Some people don't. And the alien says to you, well, what's this book like? And you go, I don't know. I've never read it.

That would be an odd thing, wouldn't it? So at the very least, read it. Well, I think Lee Mack's advice is solid. You see, what the Bible claims, what John is providing evidence for here is massive.

This is the biggest claim there is. There is nothing more important than what is in the pages of this book. Because in the pages of the Bible, we have the answer to life's biggest questions, the answer to life's biggest fears, and of course, the answer to life's biggest enemy itself, death.

[22 : 06] It is far too important to dismiss without properly investigating. So at the very least, will you be willing to examine your own skepticism and follow the evidence?

In light of Thomas' confession here, his remarkable turnaround from hardened skepticism to wonderful belief, in light of his confession, Thomas, who saw the risen Lord Jesus, and the many other witnesses who also saw the risen Lord Jesus, will you respond in faith and so know life, eternal life, life beyond death.

that is what is on offer in John's gospel. And hear the words that Jesus spoke to Thomas. Do not believe.

Do not disbelieve, rather. Do not disbelieve, but believe. Lord, Lord, before we listen to the musicians again, I'm going to pray, and then I'll hand over to the musicians.
Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you for this encounter with Thomas and the risen Lord Jesus, a man hardened in his skepticism, but unable to ignore the evidence in front of his own eyes.

[23 : 38] and so would you help us, Lord, to respond in faith to the evidence that you have provided in your word.

So help us, Lord, not to disbelieve, but to believe. Give us faith, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen.