Christ Victorious

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[0:00] Interaction that Jesus, the risen Savior, Jesus had with Thomas. And look at one or two of the things from that and hopefully apply the significance and importance of that into our own lives.

As we think about the resurrection and we've seen how significant and how important that is, we've seen that in a lot of different ways we were reminded of that this morning as well.
But it's very important to remember one or two different things about this account of Jesus and Thomas. And the first thing is that Jesus saw the risen Savior.
He wasn't with the disciples when Jesus appeared to them at first, but then a week later when the disciples were in the house again, verse 22, Thomas was with them and he, at that time, he saw Jesus.
And that's very important because Thomas is one of the disciples and he needed to be part of that witness for those who saw the risen Savior and the mark of their discipleship and the mark of their apostolic role was that they had seen the risen Savior and he was part of that witness.
[1:27] And so what's important in the early chapter, the end of the chapters and the Gospels and also in Acts, is that what we recognise is we don't have the church over a long period of time gradually coming round to the idea, well, it would be a good idea to have a risen Savior and formulating some kind of theology of a risen Savior over a long period of time.

It's no gradual kind of invention that comes through their minds as to it would be a great way to start the church. We have kind of condensed into a fairly short period of time these different resurrection appearances of Jesus, five in a day, and then four more different appearances of Jesus, one of which was to 500 people, and then laterally, as one, as it were, out of time, we born to Paul.
And that's very important that that historical reality of the risen Savior is documented and witnessed and made clear and known and understood by those who were going to go on to preach the gospel and to found the early church that was founded on this great reality of Jesus Christ, who was alive and who was well.
And now that speaks of a couple of things, it speaks just simply of the importance of the resurrection. I think we've seen that recently. I think when we looked at Easter, we looked at 1 Corinthians 15, which speaks so powerfully and in an apologetic, reasoned way, it says, look, if Jesus hasn't been raised from the dead, then we're still in our sins and everything is a waste of time.
And the reality is that our faith, as opposed to its futile, is our guarantee. I was speaking to someone this week who, the son of somebody who is dying, and the son is saying that his mother wants me to do her funeral, and she's a Christian, and I was speaking to him about her, and I was asking, you know, how is she?
[3:45] She knows she's dying, she's got terminal cancer, and he said, well, she's amazing. She knows where she's going. She knows that death for her is in the end.

And, you know, it just reminded me again, and is a great reminder to us, that it has this seal of guarantee. Sometimes, for those of you who are younger, it doesn't maybe have the same resonance.
As we begin to get older, it begins to matter more to us. The kind of significant and important things that this world hold on to are passing, and sometimes passes by.
But we have the reality of, in Christ, a guarantee that we will be raised with him, that we will live again even though we die, that the victory is his, that he's defeated death.
It's a powerful, strengthening theological truth for us to know and to understand, not only from the point of view of ourselves, but from his point of view, that he's the Christ who has come once, who has raised and ascended, but will return.

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[4:59] He's the resurrected Christ who returns, who comes back. So anything in this life that we do, or anything in this life that we are, must be understood through the perspective of a Christ who returns, and who takes home his own, or the dead will be raised, who have died in Christ, to be with him and to go with him.

And that is a really important perspective, and one that we must remind ourselves of, because we'll not read it every day in the newspaper. It doesn't come up in the media. It's a completely different world perspective to the one we're hearing every single day.
And that is part of, and I'll go on to say a little bit more about that later, so the importance of the Residue obviously is a transforming truth. It hugely transformed these early disciples, understandably, because they thought, we thought he was going to be the one. We thought he was going to be the Messiah, and he died.
It just simply hadn't grasped until they saw the resurrected Savior. It utterly transformed their lives in their thinking, and we look for and we hope that the resurrection of Jesus is a transformational truth for us in our lives.
But it also reminds us of this truth in Thomas, seeing the risen Savior. It reminds us of, almost by the way, of the importance of the physical resurrection, because it's a physical resurrected Jesus that Thomas sees.
[6:29] It's not an apparition. It's not a ghost. It's not something that's not real. It's a physical resurrected body of Jesus, no longer in the tomb, but there's still evidence of what had happened to him before his death.

And it's an affirmation for us that resurrection involves a stamp of approval on God's material creation.
This material creation that he's made that we're part of, that we feel and touch that we are, and that we stand on is going to be a renewed and resurrected creation and bodies that we have, that we will have in glory in the new heavens and the new earth, a resurrected body that can touch, that can eat, that can drink, that can talk.
It's like Christ's resurrected body, and I believe one that we will be able to recognise others will not all be new and strangers to one another, but at the same time remarkably, first Corinthians 15 talks about it as being a transformed, imperishable, honourable, powerful, immortal body.
And we read this morning from Ephesians 3 about God being able to do above and beyond what we can ask or even imagine. Well, that's the kind of realm we're moving into. We're moving into the asking or understanding above and beyond what we can ask or even imagine when we think about what Christ will do for us in resurrection.
[8:00] It's hard, I know. It's hard when we're sitting here. It's hard when we've got tomorrow to think about and we've got our work to do and our lives to live, and we rise and we get up and we do our work and we go to bed and we rise and we get up and we go to bed, and all seems very routine.

And this whole kind of other world seems to be far from us and far from our reality. That's why we need to keep reminding ourselves of who Christ is and why Christ was resurrected and why that's significant to us.
So Thomas saw the risen Saviour. That was very important. It's important for him. It's important for us. But Thomas also heard the word of peace.
Verse 26, Jesus, though the doors were locked, He came and appeared and stood among them and said, Peace be with you. Now previously, in the previous week, we're told that, He said, that twice to them, Peace be with you. Peace be with you.
Now if you'll turn back with me very briefly to John chapter 14, just a few chapters before. If you look that up and Jesus is with them in the upper room, things are a bit of a struggle for them.
[9:10] They're full of doubt and confusion about what's happening and where Jesus is going to go. And He says to them, John chapter 14 and verse 27, He says, He's talking about the counsellor, the Holy Spirit, and my Father will send my name.

He'll teach you many things. And He will remind you of everything I've said. Peace, I leave you. I leave with you. My peace, I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and don't be afraid.
Do you not think that Thomas thought about these words when Jesus said to him, Peace be with you here? It was a kind of everyday greeting. We say hi or cheer or how's it going?

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We say peace. It was an everyday greeting. But it was clearly invested with more than that simple greeting from the resurrected Saviour here. And you know when we hear something sometimes, it transports us back to another occasion when we heard it before.
And it reminds us that it could be very memorable, it reminds us of something. And I'm sure that Thomas was reminded of what he'd said to them in the upper room. Don't be troubled, don't be afraid.
[10:32] So here's Thomas here. He's been blustering all week about not seeing the resurrected Saviour. He wouldn't be able to trust unless he was able to thrust his hands into Christ's side and check for the nail marks.

And he didn't believe the disciples even though they'd said they'd seen the risen Saviour. He needed to be there. We have no real reason to know, no real understanding of why he wasn't there in the first place, but he came back among them the second time. And maybe when he saw Jesus here, he just felt not quite so good about himself.
And he felt not quite so bold and was probably fearful and troubled. And here Christ is coming to bring him and to bring us peace and order and reason from the chaos of the events of these days that he'd been through.
Now biblical peace is a really important thing and it's a really important reality for all of us in our lives. It is the opposite. When the Bible speaks of peace, divine, the peace of God, it's speaking about something that's the opposite of disorder and chaos.
Sin brings into our lives personally in our hearts and in our experiences and our relationships, chaos very often and disorder. And there's a priority and there's a structure to the peace of God that is very important for us to remember.
[12:03] It begins with the peace with God. So there's, we mentioned that this morning, the kind of vertical aspect to our salvation, the relationship between ourselves and God.

And there's five one policies there for since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.
That's what we have as Christians. We have peace with God. This reality that whatever's happening in our lives, you know, the one that is our judge, the one that we will stand before, the one who's the creator, with whom we were in chaotic dysfunction because of our sin has made peace with us through his son Jesus Christ.
And the cross is crucial to that reality. So we can't, you know, you can never move away from that reality of the cross being crucial because it's the place where we find our peace is made with God. And we need to be made right. We need to be friends with God. Anyone who you know who you're witnessing to is not a Christian needs, that's the primary, that's the fundamental, that's the basic peace they need to find.
[13:16] They need to find that peace with God through the cross of Jesus Christ. And that is, that's the most important thing for you to know and for me to know in our lives so that where we to find out today, we had terminal cancer that we could rest in the knowledge.

I'm not saying that we would take that easily or that it would be without absolute brokenness and fear and trouble. We would ultimately be able to return to this knowledge that we have this peace with God that transcends this world and transcends our experience in this world.
And there's an eternal peace which is very, very different from just the day to day living that sometimes is all we think about.
So it's a peace with God and that it reflects itself in an inner peace in our lives. And we look for that. Philippians 4.7 says, and the peace of God which transcends all on it.
You see, that's the same thing as this morning that says it's beyond understanding this morning. We're talking about the love of God. Well, here it's talking about the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your heart and your minds in Christ Jesus.
[14:30] So again, he's saying it's something that's an experience that's beyond knowledge. It's beyond simply hearing sermons. It's beyond reading books and chapters about peace.

It's beyond that level and transcends understanding. It involves understanding, but it's beyond that. It is a spiritual experience that comes miraculously from God.
It's the fruit of a reconciliation with God. So we have that peace in our heart and souls. I've used this illustration before. It's like the depth of the water and the sea under the water.

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It can be a raging storm on the surface of the water, but when you plunge into the depths, there's that kind of absolute peace, stillness, which is not reflective of what's on the surface.
It might be a great storm on the surface, but underneath there's this great calm. And it's saying that in our hearts and our minds, it's above our day-to-day experiences. It's not formulaic, but it is insurpassable.
[15:43] And as we are linked with, and we are in Christ's... Can you see the importance increasingly as Christians of being in Christ Jesus, being in relationship with and developing that?

I'm going to say a little bit. I'm going to keep coming back to this last bit, which is very, very important. We have to continue to be in that relationship with Christ to know that peace. Very often, our Christian lives, we suffer from this peace, because we've fallen in love with sin again, and we've fallen in love with living without Christ, and therefore we lose that sense of spiritual peace with Him.
But it's also not just an inner peace, but it's a piece that's reflected as a community peace. And that's the same with all our Christian life. Ephesians 2, 14 and 17, he came and proclaimed and preached peace, who has made the two one and destroyed the barrier of division.
Or Romans 12, 18, as far as it depends, and you live at peace with everyone. So, you know, you'll be going out from here today, and there'll be many ways in which the peace of your life will be threatened, sometimes internally, sometimes spiritually with God, but also maybe with other people. And in the church and in the community society in which we live, the message of the cross demands that you seek to live peaceably with other people, as far as it depends on you.
[17:18] And that is the reality of the gospel. It begins always with an inner peace, but is reflected in the way that we relate to other people and the way that we treat other people.

So, division and separation and this peace is not the way of the cross. It might be what we feel sometimes forced to do, but as much as it depends on us, we are to live at peace with other people. And that might be in your office. It might be in your living room. It might be with your neighbours. It's a very pragmatic peace, as well as a spiritual and glorious reality.
So, we see that Christ or Thomas heard the voice of Christ and Christ spoke to him. And we also see that Christ, in this great resurrected way, engaged with Thomas and spoke to Thomas.
Then he said, verse 27, Put your finger here, see my hands, reach out your hand and put into my side, stop doubting and believe, Thomas said to my Lord and my God.
[18:40] There's just such a... The resurrection in terms of the work of the person, work of Christ is really important, but there's just a nice little cameo, a nice little interaction between the risen Saviour, the living God and Thomas.

We come known doubting, Thomas. And it's a great little cameo, because it also reflects the way Jesus deals with us. Maybe not face to face, because we can't see him face to face, because he's now ascended into glory.
But spiritually, we see a couple of things. We see three things here, this week, close. The first is, he acts with compassion towards Thomas.
There's a real sense in which he is very gentle with Thomas. And he knows Thomas' complaint, or he knows Thomas' need for evidence before Thomas says anything to him.
Jesus says, you know, Thomas, put your finger here, peace be with you, put your finger here, see my hand, reach out your hand and put it into my side. Thomas, wait before...
[19:45] I'll not, there's no way I will unless I can touch or feel. And Jesus said, well, here I am. Look at me and see that I am the risen Saviour. I know. He says, I hear your complaint.

He doesn't reject him. He doesn't chastise him. He knows the weaknesses of Thomas, and he is patient and gentle and powerful and infinitely loving and personal.
That's how he deals with us. That's how this resurrected Saviour deals with you and deals with me and my life. You know, so often we kind of bow our head before him and we think, I'm ashamed to go into his presence.
I'm ashamed of what he will say. I'm expecting a harsh and chastisement from this great and glorious God, and yet he knows our weakness and he knows our complaint and he hears it.
And he doesn't reject us and remember that that is the kind of Saviour, as glorious divine Saviour that we have. And that this is the fruit of his resurrection, that he seeks to bring us to understand and to know and to appreciate who he is.
[21:00] And we'll go on to say a little bit more about that as we close. But isn't that also important again to remember in the way we treat other people?

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In the way, as is the fruit of the resurrection and the risen Saviour, the compassion with which we deal with other Christians, particularly maybe other Christians, other Christians who are battling, who are struggling with doubt, who are far from God, who have drifted from the fellowship and the company of Christians who have grown cold spiritually.
Easy to wag our finger, easy to find fault. If somehow we think that we are better than them. Or if somehow we think that their wanderings is not reflected in the wanderings of our heart.
We might not do it openly, we might not do it physically. We might not distance ourselves from the community of believers physically by not being present. But very often we can be sitting among the company of believers but be very, very far from them spiritually and far from the Saviour that we share together.
Easy for us so often to be harsh on others and easy on ourselves and to doubt the depravity of remaining sin within us.
[22:15] So be people who reflect the resurrected Saviours' compassionate attitude to one another.

So he acts with compassion but he also speaks with a warning. And I think this is kind of culminate what I've said that I'm going to be coming back to, coming back to. It's very important what he says here. And it's not immediately clear from the language.
He speaks with a warning and he speaks with a challenge. But the warning is stop doubting. But I don't know if it's a better translation but a more literal translation of this would be become not unbelieving.
And that's the kind of warning that he gives to Thomas. He says don't become unbelieving. And I think that's a very significant phrase and I find that very powerful challenge from Jesus because for me that is our natural tendency even as believers.
Last Easter I spent a lot of time one weekend when Katrina was away completely renovating the back garden that we have, small though it is, it's small but it's not that easy to get to.
[23:40] And I was laying down stones and paving and digging up and getting topsoil and I had to lug it all through the house and I had to lob it out through someone's bedroom window back into the back garden because you can't get access to paving.

I said to hours and hours and hours. Finished that work, garden was great. Looked fantastic. Now if I had left that for a year and come back to it a year later it would just been devastated.
It would have been overgrown. It would have been choked with weeds. You wouldn't have been able to see the pathway or the stones or anything because once you've made a new creation like that you need to tend it.
You need to keep it because the natural reality of life is that weeds will come in and choke it.
It doesn't just stay the same. Everything atrophies. That's the reality of life. And the same is true spiritually.
[24:48] And that's what Jesus is really referring to here. Become not unbelieving. If we don't connect to Christ, if we aren't empowered by Christ and dependent on Christ this is not about working out our own salvation in order to be saved.

This is working out our salvation because we are saved and it's doing what Christ has enabled and freed us and empowered us to do with the Holy Spirit that we have this responsibility to not become unbelieving.
And that requires work. That requires that we tend our spiritual lives. That we are focused on Christ. That we spend time in His company. And that we recognise that there's this tendency in us to fall back into unbelief.
Everyone here knows that. Everyone. Every Christian. If you don't you're a liar and a cheat and I don't believe you. Everyone knows that we will lose the closeness we have to Christ if we do not work at that relationship with it.
If you stopped praying, if your Bible is closed and if you're thinking about a million other things every time you come to church other than worshiping God. And it's just an hour that you must get through it. It's because you're not allowing Christ to work in your heart and your soul.
[26:07] And Thomas' problem ultimately was not one of evidence but one of disposition. It was a sinful heart that was wrong with him. Not the lack of evidence even though Jesus gave him that.

And that's true for us as well. We kind of hold up our hands and say, well if only Jesus would do some miracles today or if only more people believed or if only I could see him and all these kind of

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things that we say if only I'd be a better Christian.
But it's not the facts of the Gospel that need to change. It's not the fact that Jesus is resurrected even though we can't see him. It needs to change. It's our hearts that need to change.
Faith is sight of the inward eye. And it's not the facts that change. It's our person that needs to change because our tendency is to unbelief.
Become not unbelieving, Jesus says to Thomas. It's a great old Scottish commentator, Alexander McLaren. And he says, there may be belief in the truth of the Gospel and not a spark of faith in the Christ revealed by the Gospel.
[27:18] You see, we need to have faith in the person of Jesus Christ. The core of our problem is unbelief. Not evidence. It's the heart.

Not what's been revealed. And that should drive us to prayer because it reminds us that our tendency is towards unbelief in our hearts. And we need to maintain a relationship with Christ to know any of these promises of anything that is above and beyond what we've got to ask or even think because it's beyond mere understanding and mere knowledge.
And so Jesus says to Thomas with this warning, he says, become not unbelieving. That's the challenge that Jesus gives to you and me. Don't become unbelieving.
Don't rest on your spiritual laurels. Don't depend on other people. Don't think because you're saved. There's no work to be done, no relationship to be formed, no prayer to be wrestled with, no understanding of Christ to be made known.
Become not unbelieving. But then he gives them the challenge, believe. Stop doubting, he says. But believe. Jesus says with authority.
[28:32] That's what he says. He says, look, believe. He commands Thomas to believe. That's a really interesting concept, isn't it? We think belief is something that we just come to ourselves and we reason, we work out things and eventually we come and we believe.

Jesus says it's an act of the will. It's a command that he gives. And when he gives commands, he gives the ability for us to perform that command. When we come to him by faith, he gives us the faith that we need to come to him.
Drives us to God. Ephesians 2 reminds us that that is the truth. That faith is his gift and it comes from him. And we rejoice in that knowledge that we're to be people who come to him and believe. And when we believe we are to do so publicly, we had a great time this morning with our public baptisms and the public declarations of faith.
In true obedience to Romans 10, 9, if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God's raised him from the dead, you will be saved. There's that confessional reality that is part of our experience.
[29:45] And it's a belief that increases and develops as we pray. You know, those apostles of Christ, they increase our faith.

Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. So we pray, you know, we struggle so much. I don't have much faith. I'm not a great person of faith. I struggle to believe and ask for more faith.
Pray that God will give you greater and stronger faith. And it's a relational faith that there's belief that Jesus was speaking about here, that Thomas reflects in his falling before Jesus says, my Lord and my God.
That is a great reality. That is the faith, the living faith that we all share as well. It's a faith. It's a relationship that will be tested and challenged.
And I think increasingly today, maybe from some of the different political decisions and even ecclesiastical decisions this week, increasingly challenged. If you're a Christian, you'll increasingly be on the edges of society.
[30:55] And you are to rest in him. And you are to be the one who recognises him as your leader, your Lord and your God and the impossibility that might have for you.

And very lastly and very briefly, when Christ speaks with Thomas and engages with Thomas, he concludes this section by kind of engaging with us more directly.
Christ engages with Christendom because he said, blessed are you in verse 29, you have seen me and you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.
That's you and me. And Jesus is pronouncing a blessing on us for believing even though we haven't seen the gift of faith is for all believers. And it's accompanied by his blessing.

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And it is a great thing to know that we are to believe, not because we have seen physically the resurrected saviour, however significant that was for the forming of the church and for the forming of the word and for the testimony of the word being absolutely clear and central.
[32:04] But we are blessed when we believed and we have not seen. And that's a good thing. And give thanks to God for being able to believe even though you have not seen and be transformed.

In the same way that Thomas was hugely transformed here by the truth that he allowed to soak into his life. You need to do that. I need to do it for myself.
You need to do it for yourselves. You need to allow this truth to permeate your thinking. You need to take time. You will need to spend time thinking about these things and praying to the Christ who has risen, ascended and will return and take you with him to be with him forever.
Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that we would understand the resurrection of Jesus better. That it's difficult for us when we have known all our lives, known about it, that we have thought about it, that we've heard it preached.
Lord, we know particularly today that it is becoming something that is not in the psyche of the society in which we live. We laughed, ridiculed, mocked.
[33:18] People would think we were crazy for believing in the resurrection of Jesus and what it means. It's so long ago. It seems so far from the mindset and the philosophical standing of our day.

We are from the ethics and morality that we are being faced with. Yet we pray that we would allow ourselves to be people who dwell on your truth and who dwell on the person of Jesus Christ and who pray to you and to seek the power, as we saw this morning from Ephesians, the power of the Holy Spirit, to grasp how wide and how high and how long and how deep is your love.
And that it would be something that therefore, for us surpasses knowledge and surpasses understanding. The miracle of the Spirit worked in us. We thank you that despite the difficulty of the days in which we live, that you are working in this church, you are working in this city, you are bringing people to yourself, you are changing the lives and the hearts and transforming people from darkness to light, from death to life.
We rejoice in that. We do not be on the sidelines. May nobody here stand outside of grace. May no one use whatever excuse to not act on the command of God to believe.
May we be believing and help us not to return to unbelief. Help us not to allow the weeds of sin, to choke the fruit of our lives.
[35:00] But may we deal with these things and deal with the doubts and the fears and the unbelief. And may we bear the fruit of the Spirit and may our lives be a beautiful reflection of the love of Christ and may we bear much fruit in your service.

Help each of us to do that, we pray. And bless us as we sing our part in him together. For Jesus' sake, amen.

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