

Christ and Thomas

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[0 : 0 0] And like if you'll turn back with me to the readings that we've been taking from John's Gospel on Wednesday evening and also today, John chapter 20 and the well-known account of Jesus meeting with Thomas. And as I said at the beginning, I suppose the emphasis on Wednesday evening was a little bit more with Thomas meeting with Christ and today the emphasis is a little bit more on Christ meeting with Thomas. These are talks I'm hoping to do next weekend at the Harris conference. So I'm using you as guinea pigs and I know that you're fine guinea pigs and we'll listen and the Holy Spirit will still use it for our lives as that is certainly my prayer and hope. And so I'm not going to focus so much on what Thomas has been saying. You may think I'm missing out some very important bits but I hope we'll have dealt with them on Wednesday evening when we looked at Thomas himself.

But there will be undoubtedly some overlap today. And really the first thing I want to talk about is the fact that Thomas does see there is a savior. That's very clear and that's important. It's stated that a week later, member Thomas missed the first resurrection appearance to the disciples in the upper room but a week later the disciples were in the house and Thomas was with them, we're told in verse 26, though the doors were locked.

Jesus came and stood among them. So Thomas sees the risen savior and that's very significant. It's not only significant for Thomas as we'll go on to see but it's also very significant for us because Thomas is one of the evidences of the resurrection. We see him as part of this group of people who saw the resurrection. And the resurrection in other words isn't some kind of gradually formulated idea that the early church came up with as things progressed.

What would be all well? There's been some kind of mystical sights of Jesus. Or maybe we could make a resurrection. That would be good. That would get everyone to church if we said that Jesus had risen from the dead and will formally adopt the resurrection that somehow came into the church's mindset over a long period of time. It wasn't some kind of gradually made up formulation of the early church. We have very clear, early accounts of resurrection that decrease rather than increase in the accounts that we have in the Bible. There was five in one day, then there was the appearance here to Thomas specifically, then there was four more resurrection accounts over 40 days gradually becoming less. But one of these appearances was to over 500 people at one time. And then lastly there was the resurrection appearance to Paul as to one untimely born. And these are vital. And Thomas is part of that tradition, part of that tradition of people who saw very clearly all with different backgrounds, all with different characters, all in different places and times, who saw the resurrection, who saw Jesus in the flesh. And that is a reminder to us of the importance of the resurrection. If you have time today, read 1 Corinthians 15. Spend time reading 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul gives a great apologetic for the importance of the resurrection and is very clear in his statements that if there is no resurrection, we are to be more pity than any other people on this earth because we're living a sham. Our faith is a waste of time, it's a futile faith that we have. If the dead are not raised in Christ then there's no hope whatsoever. And he makes very clear the significance and the importance of the resurrection. It's your guarantee and it's my guarantee that when we die we will not just remain in the ground. That our souls, as we trust in Jesus, go to be with him and that on that last great day our bodies will be resurrected also for the new heavens and the new earth. It's our guarantee that what Christ has done has been real. It's the seal on his defeat of sin and death and the grave and that affects all of us in our lives. It's a reminder to us just as he's returned, as he has come once and he is raised from the dead, he will return again so that we are in that time between his first and his second appearing. And these are transforming truths. It should be for us, transforming to know that we have a living risen Savior. It should change how we live. There is no doubt whatsoever that the disciples' lives were dramatically changed in the light of the resurrection. The fact that they came to understand that Jesus was a risen Savior. Our lives similarly transformed because we know who is Lord, that we will be accountable to him, that his love is astonishingly great and that he will return. It's the importance of the resurrection, but also it speaks of in this first point of Thomas seeing the risen Savior, the reality of the physical resurrection, the reality of the bodily resurrection, not just of Jesus but as Jesus being the first fruits of all who believe, our physical resurrection. It's an affirmation of the goodness of the physical world, of the material world that God created and in the beginning when he had

seen it and it was finished he said, this is very good. This is very good. Now we know it's been tarnished and broken and bruised and dirtied by sin, but at the resurrection we will recognise and know a redeemed resurrection of our bodies. And our bodies will be bodies resurrected that can touch, that can eat, that can drink, that can talk, that can walk, just like Jesus' resurrected body was, yet that is absolutely transformed. Now we're not told much about the transformation although 1 Corinthians 15 again says some great things about what our resurrected body will be. It will be imperishable, it will be honourable, it will be powerful, it will be spiritual, it will be immortal, it will be well equipped to live in the new heavens and the new earth and that is a great thing, something to look forward to, something to hope for, something to believe in because Thomas saw this bodily resurrection of Jesus. He was there before them, he ate breakfast with them, he was among them as a real person, it wasn't a ghost, it wasn't an apparition, it wasn't a vision, it wasn't something that came and went, it was him in reality with his body resurrected.

[7 : 45] And it does remind me of the prayer in Ephesians 3 for our encouragement when we pray to the Lord and look to him that he will do immeasurably more than we can ask or even imagine and that's what he will do for us in Christ. That heaven will be something that is just beyond imagination, beyond the greatest imagination that we can have of it, far greater than we anticipate and that is to be something we are to really rejoice and praise God for. So Thomas saw the risen Savior. We also see in the second place that Thomas heard the word of peace.

Jesus spoke to them again, he did this twice, did it the first week, did it the second week and very usually in the Bible when things are repeated, they are repeated for significance because they are significant and because God wants them to be repeated and it was recorded the second time Jesus says, peace be with you. Now some of you might argue that was just an everyday greeting. Well it was just an everyday greeting, the shalom of God, the peace of God. But it seems almost undeniable that it is invested with more than just an ordinary greeting here in the circumstances and because of who said it. Surely the disciples and Thomas especially would have been transported back to the upper room when they heard Jesus at this point saying peace be with you because that is what Jesus spoke about didn't he, in John chapter 14 and verse 27. You know when they were in the upper room just before the crucifixion and Jesus says these famous words, peace I leave with you, my peace I give you, I do not give you the world give, do not let your hearts be troubled, do not be afraid. So when he hears this the second time, this introduction, this welcome of peace, it would have reminded him of the promise that Jesus gave to the disciples in the upper room that there was this great sense in which Jesus is saying to him and to them all don't be afraid. It must have been a fearful vision particularly for Thomas as it was for the disciples the previous week. Don't be troubled, don't be afraid, I am not judging you, I am here to bring Thomas particularly for you and your troubled heart and your heart that is chaotic. Remember on Wednesday night we looked at the week that he must have had from the Sunday previous to this Sunday when the disciples were rejoicing and full of joy they had seen the Saviour. He wasn't there, I will not believe, went away to his everyday life for the week. The turmoil he must have been in, the chaos, the confusion, the stomach, butterflies going, everything just not been right and Jesus says here I am here to bring and the meaning of the word is very much order, peace, sense and reason into the chaos that has become your life Thomas. Peace be with you. It creates importance in that whole concept of biblical peace is the opposite of the disorder and the chaos that sin brings into our lives and we see its priority biblically in the way, in how it is expressed. It comes first of all from peace with God. When we are looking at peace and we are thinking about peace and we are talking about peace, biblically it always begins with peace that we can receive with God, from God through what Jesus Christ has done. Romans 5 1 says, Therefore since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

My peace I give to you says Jesus and it is a peace first of all that is with God. Sin brings chaos and disruption into our relationship with God. It brings division and the cross is what brings peace again with God because sin is dealt with there and the primary peace that every single person needs is to be made right with God through Christ, through what He has achieved as the one who alone can say, My peace I give to you. And so friendship with God, peace with God is what we first need in our lives. Whatever else is your priority, whatever else is significant to you, however much you want to be friends with everybody else in the world, the first friendship you must make that I must recognise and worship and praise God for is the peace that we can have with God through Jesus Christ, the most significant reunion and relationship and reconciliation that there can be. And that peace with God leads to an inward peace. Philippians 4 verse 7 speaks about the peace of God which transcends all understanding, guarding our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. So the fruit of reconciliation with God has first of all that inward peace in our hearts and in our lives. I was reading a magazine yesterday which I can't remember the name of and there was a question and answer in it with a person whose name I can't remember. She was supposed to be famous but I never heard of her and I'm sure she was very famous. And one of the questions is what's the most overrated, was it emotion, maybe emotion or human feeling and she said inner peace. I would have to take, I would have to challenge that and say that I disagree with her. I think that inner peace is very significant and not overrated and it can only be found when first of all there is that peace with Jesus Christ. The magazine was Vanity Fair. Just to let you know. It was an inner peace. Inner peace is very significant and it's the peace that

God gives, it's from God and it transcends all understanding. It is not formulaic and it's above circumstances so it's not saying oh everything, I feel great because everything's good around me, outside of me, in my life, in my relationships. There may be turmoil and struggle and problems outwardly for us but there's a spiritual inner peace in our lives because we know who's we are and we know his love and we know that these difficult times will pass and he will be with us through them. And we have to ask as Christians if we have lost that sense of peace. If our life is chaotic from within and that we don't really have that sense of peace and we're always on the lookout for something different. Have we lost touch with the Christ who gives us that peace? So there's that inner peace and it does of course lead to community peace as well. It leads to that. As I said in prayer there's a vertical relationship with God but it should affect our horizontal relationships with one another so it should lead to peace at a horizontal level. Firstly within the church.

Not to be sniffed at, not to be ignored, not to be rubbished. Very important that his peace, that his victory, that is won should mean that we relate to each other in a loving and in a peaceful way but also as much as it depends on us as Christians, peace in the world outside Romans 12, 18 as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Very often we've not been like that as Christians. We've found it very easy, yes we give thanks for Jesus Christ and all he's done. But I can't stand that person next to me. Did you hear what they're doing here? And I don't want to be at peace in the world and I don't want to argue for peace in the world. Why not? We know it comes primarily through Christ but we recognise the importance at all levels to as much as it depends on us, live at peace with everyone else. It's just so easy for us to be divisive and to be bitter and to be at war with each other and that's an offence to Jesus. There's nothing proud, nothing good and nothing holy about that. So we recognise peace and Jesus speaks about peace here. Then we also see in the third place that Christ engages with Thomas. He speaks to Thomas. It's great isn't it? I love the way that in these post resurrection accounts Jesus deals personally with the ones who are struggling. There's Thomas and then there's Peter who he deals with so beautifully and personally. Go and tell the disciples and Peter and how he speaks to Peter. Do you love me and so on. But anyway that's a different sermon. He speaks to Thomas.

[17:37] Then he said to Thomas, put your finger here, see my hands, reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe. It's lovely personal cameo with the God of the, the resurrected God of the universe speaking to Thomas this one individual. And it does parallel I hope for us some of the personal interactions we have with Jesus Christ as believers. Christ engages with Thomas with compassion. There's no doubt that there's compassion in these words. Thomas he says, put your finger here and in so doing and saying that he says, Thomas I know what you've struggled with. I know how difficult you found it. I heard what you said last week in the upper room that unless you see my hands, unless you see the side, then here is Thomas. I know. Remember he said, don't be troubled and be afraid. Peace be with you. And here he's acting with compassion. I'm hearing your complaint.

He doesn't come to reject him. He doesn't come to cast aside his weakness. He doesn't say, well, you're not going to be one of the 10 disciples that are left to live. You're not going to be 11 to say you're hopeless. I can't find the church on someone like you.

You're rubbish. You don't believe. Go on. Get lost. It's not like that. Jesus doesn't act like that. He's patient and gentle, powerful, infinitely loving and personal. Compassionate.

That remains the Savior to whom we call to and cry out to every time we pray. A Savior who is compassionate, who knows that we're weak, who knows that we struggle, who knows that we find it difficult to live as Christians and who is infinitely loving and personal and patient and gentle, yet powerful. Please recognize that. Don't have a different picture of Jesus Christ because it is unbiblical. Remember that in your prayer times. Remember He understands and He wants you to cry out to Him. And we should also remember to reflect that Christlike characteristic in our relationship with others. I think the disciples showed it here in the way they dealt. We're not told much how they dealt with Thomas, but they didn't cast a game or ostracize him from their group when they met the second week and they invited Thomas to be with them. They were saying, well, I'll not believe.

And they were doubting them and maybe they were hurt by that. Hurt by the fact that he didn't believe what they had seen. But they didn't throw him out. They didn't say, no, you're not one of us. They showed a similar compassion. So should we. Easy in our Christian lives. Can I say there's a principle, I think. I don't think it's elucidated anywhere except in the the World Book of Derrick's knowledge. And it is that we're often very harsh in our judgments on other people, but we're very easy on ourselves. You know, when it comes to judging, we're very forgiving of ourselves and of our failure and of our doubt. But my goodness, when it comes to other people, we can be tremendously harsh, very proud and very slow to forgive. But we have to be compassionate and ask Jesus for that same compassion. It's an oxymoron, isn't it, to be a judgmental, proud Christian. It's ugly. So he speaks with compassion. He also speaks, though, to Thomas as Jesus does with a warning. It's translated here, you know, stop doubting and believe. It is, as I think I mentioned on Wednesday, better translated, become not unbelieving, but believe. And therein is again a tremendous recognition by Jesus of the propensity of our hearts. The natural direction of our hearts is towards unbelief. Become not unbelieving. That's our natural tendency. It's like that untended garden, isn't it? It might look great when it's all weeded and the flowers are in it, but if we just walk away and leave it and come back six months later, it will be full of weeds because the tendency of the ground is to grow weeds and to need to be cared for and to need to be weeded. And that's very clearly the tendency of our hearts. Our hearts tend towards unbelief. And when I talk about unbelief there, I'm not talking about the unbelief that I showed with Ross at the beginning. It's not that Ross didn't believe that he had to fall back and I would catch him. He understood that clearly. It's the trust that I try to get across. That there's a difference between believing in the fact of falling back and being caught and actually allowing yourself to fall back and be caught.

[22 : 53] Do you see that? And so it is, that's the unbelief that we have a tendency to. I'm not talking about intellectually theism here. I'm not saying that any of us as Christians tend to intellectually no longer believe in the resurrection. Don't think so. I hope so. But there is a tendency not to trust. There is a tendency within us to stop laying our hearts before God and trusting in Him. Thomas' problem wasn't ultimately one of evidence although sympathetically I think as we saw on Wednesday that was good that he needed the evidence. But ultimately it was one of disposition because Jesus says, be not unbelieving but believe. You see it's the problem with the human heart isn't evidence, it's the human heart. That's the difference. It's the fact that it's not more evidence we need of Jesus, it's the fact that we need our hearts to change because we're not asked simply to believe in facts, we're asked to trust in the person of Jesus Christ. And that's what is the difference. The code of unbelief isn't evidence but our disposition, our heart which tends to say no, no, no. I'll not trust in Jesus. I'll not rely on Him in a child-like way. The great old Scottish theologian Alexander McLaren says there may be belief in the truth of the gospel and not a spark of faith in the Christ revealed by the gospel. So I would say people here, everyone here, all of us here believe in the truth of the gospel but do we have faith in the Christ who's revealed by the gospel? We see the difference, there's a very, and it's a very important difference for church people to understand because we can be church people all our lives. We can be brought up in the church, we can know and believe the Bible and say from an early age I believe the Bible, I believe the facts of the Bible, I believe in the resurrection but is your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ? Is

He your Lord and Savior? Is He the one that you, in whom you have a child-like dependence? I'm not talking about the facts here. Good grief, we move beyond the facts, most of us I hope, but is there this relationship with Christ? Become not unbelieving Thomas, don't drift away from your relationship with me. There's a great warning there and alongside it goes a great challenge. Believe, become not unbelieving or stop doubting and believe.

Great authority isn't there in what Jesus says there to Thomas? It's a command to exercise faith, drives us to God, to depend on God and to trust in God, to believe in God and that is what He wants us to do, to have that faith in Him, not just in the facts and that faith we know and I'm not going to spend time on this, it's confessional. We don't only just believe in our hearts but we confess it in our lives. Romans 10 verse 9, if you confess with your mouth Jesus of Lord and believe in your heart that God's raised him from the dead you'll be saved. There's a confessional aspect to your faith. There's a prayerful aspect to that faith being developed as we're reminded clearly in Luke 17 where the disciples say Lord increase our faith, they recognise that they need to pray to Jesus for their faith to be increased and of course as I've mentioned before it's also relational that faith. Proverbs 3,5, trust in the Lord with your own heart, lean not on your own understanding, it's a trusting in the Lord. So that relates and I want to say a little bit more about that relational but just before we close it's a relationship so like any relationship it will be tested, it will be opposed, it will be challenged, it will go through difficult times, it will go through good times, so will our relationship with Christ but through these things it will be developed and it will grow if we remain close to Christ. We are complete the apprentice addicts in our home, we watch the apprentice and it's a great programme if you want to learn about human nature. If you want to learn about the sinfulness of human nature the apprentice is a great programme to watch. But what's interesting about the apprentice is that they split into two groups, two teams each week and there's a team leader appointed each week to work out a task that is given to them by the Managing Director

Sir Alan Sugar and a lot of focus is put on the leader and if they fail that task you find a lot of knives out for the leader and what's very interesting is as they talk about leadership how quickly they focus on the failure of the leader that they couldn't trust the leader, the leader wasn't worthy of being trusted that I would have been better myself and there's this great, you see the great kind of importance of good leadership and also bad leadership and Christ is our leader and he's our team leader, he's the one that we are asked to entrust our lives to in a much, much greater way than in a business way obviously and as a great leader we can rely on him and trust in him. Now I'm a leader spiritually, I'm a leader here in the congregation and there are times when I and I'm sure other elders just feel tremendously weary of being in leadership, having to make the decisions, having always to be there, having to choose, having to lead, having to decide between different courses of action, sometimes it's great and you could love just to be part of a team where someone else is taking the responsibility, taking the weight, taking the leadership.

Have you ever felt like that? You may have felt like that in your work or in your university or college if you're part of a team. Well that's what's great about Christ, is he's the one that we can look to and he can take the weight and he's the one that can lead us in our lives and guide us and show us the right way and he is worthy and he'll not make mistakes, he'll not let us down, he'll not do the wrong thing, he is the best leader of our lives and that's what entrusting ourselves to him is about. It's not about believing in the facts of Jesus alone, it's about entrusting our lives to his leadership, to his authority, to his commands, to his dictate because he is loving, he's our Father and because he is our Saviour. So there's that aspect of belief and you're encouraged to believe in that trusting way and the very last thing and I'm not going to spend any time on this is Christ engages with Christendom. He speaks beyond the confines of the upper room when he says in verse 29, because you have seen me you believe, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. That takes it right into St. Columbus 2009, blessed are those who have not seen and believed and I hope that if you're a Christian today that that beatitude is one that applies to you because you have not seen the risen Saviour physically like Thomas did but yet you believe. We started with peace, that's great, we finished with blessing and that's two great really big aspects of Christianity is peace and also blessing and blessing is what God gives us when we put our faith and trust in him. It's a reflection of his own character. 1 Timothy 6 15 says God the blessed and only ruler king of king and Lord of lords and it's an attribute of contentment in God of happiness, of joy, of pleasure, all the things maybe you don't associate with God if you think he's harsh and oppressive and distant, we find that here is a different picture of the one who blessed creation at the beginning when he said it's good and in Christ we share that blessedness, that pleasure, that joy in relationship with him, that reflection of what it means to be friends with him again. It's a big, big concept and we are blessed, we are content, there's a happiness in our lives and it's deeper than the English word happiness but it pushes towards what it means and very often sadly I think we have reflected the characteristic of misery in our Christianity. Oh the weight of the world is on our shoulders, we have the opposition of the evil one, things are terrible, we live in a world that doesn't believe and while all these things are true, if it makes us miserable, if it makes us utterly depressed then we have lost sight of the whole concept of what Christ has done. We have sadly often reflected the Reverend I am jolly characteristic that sometimes is portrayed of us as Christians, miserable, doer, unhappy, weight burdened, discontented, loveless, dispirited Christians.

[33 : 00] Why is that the case? Because we take our eye off Jesus Christ and what He has done and what He has achieved. We need to know what we believe and we need to believe what we know, it's not good enough in our lives just to intellectually assent to that knowledge but we must allow that knowledge to let us fall back with our legs straight into the arms of Jesus Christ and entrust our lives to Him. Not just the Sunday morning lives but the career lives, the financial lives, the relationship lives, the inner lives, the heart lives, the obedient lives, every part of our life that we submit to this Lord and Saviour.

That will lead to the acclamation here of Thomas my Lord and my God, one of worship and one of transformation. We are looking for worshipful lives and transformed lives as we entrust ourselves to Jesus Christ. Will you do that? Will I do that more and more and see these great realities of peace and blessing blossom in our life, in our experience, in our church? Where are you today in your relationship with Christ? What part of your journey are you on? Have you turned your back on Him? Have you lost sight of Him? Do you no longer believe in Him? Have you matured away from Him in a worldly way? Have you never yet entrusted yourself to Him? Have you got into a rut of thinking He is ordinary and dull? Do other things excite you much more than Jesus Christ? Is there no longer peace and blessing in your heart? Please ask these questions as the Holy Spirit applies these truths to our hearts.

Heavenly Father, hear us as we pray, hear us as we cry out, we feel so like Thomas in our lack of trust and we recognise the tendency of our hearts towards a lack of trust, towards practical atheism, towards that unbelief, maybe not intellectually or factually, but relationally, that we have such a battle against pride and independence. So help us Lord to entrust our lives to you, afresh this day if that is what we need to do. Give us the simplicity of faith that does not overlook trouble and trial and problems and difficulties, but works through them in facing Jesus Christ and looking for His compassion and His grace and His love.

May that be our experience and may we know your spirit speaking and challenging and comforting and convicting us in our conscience and our hearts today and bless our continued worship and our day today, the Lord's day. They set apart to enable us to think more on you and to allow ourselves time in your presence. We ask these things in your precious name. Amen.