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EASTER: He Wasn't Kidding

John 20:24-31

Now 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 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." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you 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; but 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.

When I was in the third grade, I had a classmate who kept telling me every day that he was building small watches at home that had a TV screen on them. This was well before Apple Watches and all the technology we had today. We just had those tubes in TVs, and he kept telling me he could get me a watch with a TV on it. I just needed to give him a little cash, and he would then buy the stuff so he could make my watch so I could see it.

I gave him a little bit of cash, and I waited and I waited and I waited. And then finally, one day, he told me he was just kidding. It was my first lesson in learning: you can't trust everything everybody says. And that's one of the great challenges in life, is learning who you can trust and who you can't.

But trust is important. Developing a trust in things that are trustworthy makes life much more meaningful. How do you know who you can trust as your friends? And if you want to buy a vehicle, how do you know who you can trust? And developing a confidence in someone you can buy a vehicle from? Or how do you know who you can trust well to share vulnerable things with? And then how do you know who you can trust with real-life issues? For millions of people in the world, Easter answers that question for them—who they can trust with the real-life issues.

I want to talk to you today about one individual who went through a real crisis of trust in his life, but then had this question of who he could trust answered very clearly for him. Eight days after the first Easter Sunday morning, we're looking today at Thomas. Jesus was walking on the earth, and he recruited 12 disciples to follow him. We know this from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Now Matthew, Mark, and Luke only mention Thomas in the list of disciples, and they say nothing else about him. But John tells us more. John tells us near the end of his ministry time here on the earth, Jesus had turned his face towards Jerusalem, and he was heading there. And most of his disciples were encouraging him not to go. John tells us this after he told his disciples where they were headed. They said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you. Why would we go there again?"

But Thomas, called the twin because his name was Didymus in the Greek, which means twin—Thomas, called the twin—said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." Great dedication. Thomas was willing to die with Jesus as Jesus was discipling him and training him.

But as they got to Jerusalem, his heart started to change. He started to question Jesus a little bit. Jesus entered Jerusalem with his disciples on what we know of as Palm Sunday. And the Bible tells us the whole city was stirred up. And throughout this week, it got very tense in Jerusalem.

And by the time Jesus was celebrating the Last Supper with his disciples, they were probably a little on edge. They were a little tense about being in the city and all the things that were being said about Christ, and they knew that they were likely in danger. And during this Last Supper, Jesus said to them to calm them, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." He said to him—this is John chapter 14—"You believe in God. Believe, trust also in me."

And then he said these famous words: "In my Father's house there are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you." Then he said, "I'm going there to prepare a place for you, and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back to take you to be with me, that you may also be where I am." And then he said, "You know the place to where I'm going."

But Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way?" And then Jesus made his famous statement, John 14, verse six: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me."

Well, we know that night Jesus was arrested. He was crucified the next day, and then he was put in a grave. And then we come around to Easter Sunday morning.

And on that day, Mary Magdalene went. Peter. John went. They saw the empty tomb. Later that night, on the first day of the week, the doors were locked. The disciples were in hiding for fear of the Jews, fear of their own lives. And Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. 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'm sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Now the disciples are anointed with the spirit, and there they are. But John tells us something specific, and we read it in our gospel text today: Thomas, one of the 12, was not with them. So the other disciples told him, “We've seen the Lord.”

But he said to them—here is Thomas now entering a crisis of faith, the one who said he would go die with Jesus. Through the tension of the week, they got rattled. He has not seen the resurrected Christ, and he's in a crisis of faith himself—and he says, “Unless I see 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.”

Thomas says, “I'm not going to trust what you're telling me. I need to do my own research. I need my own evidence. I need some proof. If I'm going to put my faith in something you're saying, I need renewed confidence. I need to decide for myself what I'm going to believe. And I need some of my own evidence and some time to figure it out. I'm not just going to trust what you say.”

Well, John continues, and he says, eight days later, the disciples were inside again. Thomas was with them. The doors were locked because it still didn't feel safe for him. Jesus came again and stood among them. And he said again, “Peace be with you.”

By the way, God wants you and I to walk in peace. You can see this clearly. His heart for us is to walk in a supernatural peace. There he is, standing among his disciples eight days after his resurrection. Thomas is there with him. And he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here. See my hands? Put your hand out and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve,” Jesus said to Thomas, “but believe.”

And now Thomas answered him, full in confidence in Christ yet again, “My Lord and my God.” I can only imagine that Thomas was relieved. Not only was he relieved, but his faith was renewed. Now he understood that everything Jesus said to him was true. Everything Jesus taught him was true. He realized in this moment Jesus wasn't kidding.

Jesus wasn't joking around. He was who he said he was. When Jesus said he was the resurrection and the life after raising his friend Lazarus from the dead, Thomas now knew he is the resurrection and the life. When Jesus told his disciples in that Last Supper he's the way, the truth, and the life, that no one comes to the father except through him, Thomas now knew this was absolutely true.

When Jesus said he was going ahead of his followers into heaven, to his Father's house to prepare a place for them, and he was going to come back to take them to be with him in his eternal house, Thomas knew he could count on Jesus. He could take him at his word. He could trust him.

I can only imagine that in this moment, Thomas's relief about all the major issues of life was overwhelming to him. He now knew he could rest in peace in his faith in this man.

There are millions of people around the world today celebrating Easter, and we all celebrate at different levels based on our faith. Thomas had lost his faith for a while, but then when he got what he needed back from God, his faith was renewed and his celebration ensued.

I wonder today, where is your faith as we're walking through this Easter celebration today? Are you celebrating in the goodness of God? Are you very confident in the work of Christ on your behalf? Do you have some sense of assurance and peace not only about this life, but about eternal life?

For Easter is ultimately about what happens to us after we die. It's a message to us about God's work to save us from eternal death, eternal separation from God, and bring us into the presence of God forever. And God wants us to know that we have eternal life.

And if you're listening today and you're not celebrating Easter in a great way, I want to encourage you: you're in good company. There are many doubters. Thomas himself, one of the closest followers of Jesus, was a doubter, and he needed evidence. He needed God to touch him and give him faith.

And if that's you today and you're walking through this Easter season not as confident as you'd like to be, I want to encourage you to reach out to God. Ask him to stir in you a confidence in Jesus. Ask him to open your eyes to who Jesus really is and to what he's done.

And if you need to do your own seeking and praying like Thomas did, I want to encourage you to do that. Continue to look into the evidence around the resurrection of Christ, because the resurrection of Christ is the validation of everything Jesus taught us while he was here on the earth. And then when we understand that he really did rise from the dead, we can take Him at His Word and we can trust his words for us.

Listen to what Jesus said to Thomas after he came to believe and his faith in Christ was renewed. Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. But blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed."

Friends, this is your and my opportunity to believe in Christ, even though we've never seen him. This is the invitation of the Bible. And God says if we come to believe and our faith is strengthened in God, we'll be blessed by him.

If you're listening today and you want more faith, you want more confidence in God, I want to invite you to do a couple things. First, I want to invite you to pray. Ask God to open the eyes of your heart so that you might be able to see what's really true about this Jesus.

Millions of people have come to the knowledge of Christ and understand that Christ is living and alive today. But they've had a journey to get there, and everyone has a different journey of how their faith is born and then how it is strengthened and how it grows. And that all happens by the good work of God.

For faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. And even our salvation comes by grace through faith. It's not of ourselves. God wants to do this in us. So ask God to open the eyes of your heart that you might see the living Christ for who he is.

And if you have a lot of doubts and a lot of questions, do what Thomas did. Do some seeking. Look into the evidence for the resurrection. And as you're doing it, ask God to help you see what's really true—what is true.

And then when you start to sense that this might be true, I want to encourage you this: keep exposing yourself to what has been taught us and revealed to us about Jesus, and then start acting on what he said. Because as we obey him, our faith is strengthened and our works produce more faith. Actions in our faith show God's evidence in our lives, and he rewards us when we operate in faith.

Hebrews 11:6 says, “Without faith we can't please God. But anyone—anyone who comes to God, believes that he is God, earnestly seeks him—they'll be rewarded by him because of their faith in seeking.”

God wants to meet you right where you are. The living Christ is alive. He's being patient with the world, and he's wanting more and more people to come to him to grow strong in the grace that he's offering us, in the knowledge of who he is, so that we might have life and live fully in him.

This is the Easter miracle that can happen inside of you and me—to live this supernatural life the moment we believe. Friends, the same spirit that raised Christ from the dead can enter into our hearts and our spirits, and we cry out, “ABBA, father!” And that power within us can help us be conquerors of bad habits, of sins, of anxieties, of worries, of fears.

And we can start to live in a Christ-honoring, spirit-filled, spirit-empowered way. And God wants that for you. Praise God. That's what Easter Sunday morning is about.

Christ has conquered the sin within us. He's conquered the power of Satan. He has conquered death on our behalf. And he wants us to live like that's true.

And when you look at Thomas's life and the disciples' life, their whole lives are evidence that it's absolutely true. Because who, being in their position, who absolutely knew what was true about Jesus—they saw the resurrected Christ—would either have given up on Christ if they didn't see him, or they would sell out for him if Christ reappeared to them?

And their lives are evidence that Jesus is alive today. He is ascended into heaven. He has poured His Spirit out on the earth. Those that believe can be empowered by His Spirit. And one day he will come again to take those of us who know him, who are trusting in him, to be with Him in His Father's house.

Friend, if you're listening to this today and you've never opened your heart to Christ, but you sense him inviting you to open your heart to him now, to take a risk with him and say, “God, come into my life. Forgive my sin because of the work of Jesus. Cleanse me and then make me your child.”

If that's you and you're hearing this, I want to just tell you: you can simply pray that right where you are, and you can invite Christ to adopt you into his eternal family.

And then I would encourage you, if you're not a part of a church that's teaching the Bible, a group of people that are pursuing God—we need these things to have our faith strengthened. God says he works in community, and we shouldn't forsake gathering together to encourage each other in our faith journey.

So I would just ask you: find a church family. Seek around until you get one that's right for you, that's nourishing your soul and building you up so you can join others in encouraging each other to live under the power of the spirit in the resurrection life that God wants us to live.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for the opportunity to look into Your Word today and how it shows us that you work with each of us individually, at our points of need, to bring us along in our journeys with you, in getting to know you, and then living in a relationship with you by faith—understanding that you're alive and well and that you're for us, and that you want to continue to fuel us by the power of your spirit, the same spirit that raised Christ from the dead.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.