

## 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

APRIL 7, 2013

### BUT THESE ARE WRITTEN

Pastor Jim Dunn

(Thank you to Jeffrey Gibbs for his sermon notes on this passage on *Lectionary at Lunch* on iTunes)

#### **John 20:19-31**

##### **Jesus Appears to the Disciples**

**19** 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." **20** When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. **21** Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." **22** And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

##### **Jesus and Thomas**

**24** Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. **25** 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."

**26** 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." **27** 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." **28** Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" **29** Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

---

## The Purpose of This Book

**30** Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; **31** 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.

---

No visit to the Holy Land would be complete without a visit to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

I have never gone, but if you would ever *get* the chance to go, you must go to Jerusalem. You have to see the places where Jesus was crucified and where He was buried. The Gospel of John tells us that those two places were very close together (John 19:41). So, to see those two sites today, tour guides will take you to one place: the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, that is believed to have been built on the very site where Jesus was crucified and buried. They will take you *inside* the church. And inside that church they will show the place where Jesus was crucified and then inside the church they will show you where His tomb was. But is that the right place? Why is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre inside the city walls, not outside the city walls, for the Gospel of John says Jesus' crucifixion was outside the city (John 19:20)? And, even supposing that is the right place, is that the right **spot**? Is the rocky outcrop, now enclosed within an upstairs chapel, actually the top of Golgotha where Jesus was crucified? Is the marble slab that the tour guide shows you really where the dead Jesus was laid? Is the tourist **just supposed to accept that**, just supposed to believe the tour guide?

We're not told whether the disciple Thomas was taken to Jesus' tomb to show him that it was empty. But would it have mattered? Wasn't Thomas **just supposed to accept that** Jesus was resurrected? As Jesus Himself said, "Blessed are those who have **not seen** and yet have believed." The resurrection of Jesus is just a matter of faith. You just have to accept it, right?

You just have to accept it. Is that all we have to offer? When we have conversations about religion with friends who don't believe, is that all we have to offer them: "You just have to accept it"?

Well, the other disciples did NOT tell Thomas, “You just have to accept it.” They said to him, “We have **seen** the Lord.” Now, you and I cannot say that. But these words the disciples spoke to Thomas may remind us of Peter’s directive: “Always be prepared to give **an answer** to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” (1 Peter 3:15) The disciples gave Thomas an answer. They did not say, “You just have to accept it.”

If the resurrection of Jesus is just a matter of blindly accepting it, then why did it occur in a place where so much history was written down? As Paul stated at his own trial in Jerusalem many years later: “It was not done in a corner.” (Acts 26:26) In other words, Jesus’ resurrection did not happen on the island of Papua New Guinea nor on the frozen tundra of Greenland. His resurrection occurred in an empire whose history is written in detail by a number of historians.

If the resurrection of Jesus is just a matter of blindly accepting it, then why did Jesus appear to Thomas? Why any of the resurrection appearances? And why the miracles before that? Why did God provide all these signs, as John calls them? Why did Jesus say, “Even though you do not believe Me, believe the signs, the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me and I in the Father”? (John 10:38) Why did God give the disciples the greatest sign of all, Jesus appearing to them in His resurrected resurrection body? If Christianity is really a matter of blind acceptance, then Jesus’ resurrection appearances were unnecessary. And Thomas and the others **did not need to see** Jesus alive after His death.

**But Thomas and the others did need to see Jesus alive after His death.** They were not merely struggling with doubt that they could eventually get past. Jesus did not say to Thomas, “Stop *doubting* but believe.” He said, “Stop *disbelieving* but believe.” The translation we read earlier (ESV) is far more accurate than the usual. In the original Greek it says, *Me ginou **apistos** alla **pistos***. Literally, “Stop being unbelieving but believe.” As someone has said, “Doubting Thomas? I doubt it.” (Gibbs) Unbelieving Thomas?

Okay, if we take for granted one of the greatest statements of faith in the whole New Testament: "My Lord and My God!" We can say that Thomas should have made this great statement of faith **immediately** after the report of the disciples. Well, we could say that about the other disciples, too. They should have just accepted the report of the women that morning. The truth is none of the men believed at first, except for John, until Jesus gave them the resurrection appearances.

Later, Paul would not believe until Jesus graciously appeared to him on the road to Damascus. He stated at his trial that Jesus said to him on the road that day: "Now get up and stand on your feet. I have **appeared** to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have **seen** of Me." (Acts 26:16)

The first Christians believed, because they saw Jesus alive from the dead. They believed, because by His grace God gave them the resurrection appearances. For them, those appearances were necessary. It was perhaps the only way that faith could have happened for them. Being eyewitnesses of the resurrection was vital for them.

Their eyewitness accounts are vital for us, are God's grace to us. Their eyewitness accounts have the power to **create** faith in others and us. As John writes, "Jesus did many other **miraculous signs** which are not recorded in this book. But these are written **that you may believe** Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." (John 20:30-31) In other words, John was an eyewitness of the miracles including the greatest one, Jesus' resurrection. And He wrote down his eyewitness account, because it has the power to cause you, the reader, to believe that Jesus is your Savior, the Son of God. As Jesus Himself had said, "My prayer is not for them alone, but for those who will believe in Me *through their message...*" (John 17:20)

The apostolic Word, the account of the eyewitnesses, has power to create faith. It is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It has the power to convince others and us that through Jesus death and resurrection we have forgiveness for our sins, that when Jesus says, "Peace be with you," we have full, complete peace with God in Christ.

---

The account of the eyewitnesses has the power to create faith, so that we don't have to be like the Jerusalem tour guides. We're not merely passing along a tradition. We're not expecting anyone "to just have to accept it." We pass along the account of eyewitnesses...with confidence that it can create faith. We can give an answer for the reason for the hope that we have.

We can answer that we have hope in a resurrected Savior, because Thomas and John and Mary Magdalene and 500 others **saw** Jesus resurrected and heard these powerful, gracious words from His own Easter resurrection lips, "Peace be with you."

Amen!