

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed

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[0 : 00] A big welcome to everyone here tonight, especially if there are any visitors here. It's lovely to see you and to be here to worship God and to read his word and to listen to what he has to say to us tonight.

So before we start, I'm just going to say a few words of prayer, but perhaps the intimations, the only thing that I think is necessary to know is our minister, David MacLeod, is coming back this week and next Sunday's services will be led by him the morning and the evening.

So we very much look forward to that. So let's just bow our heads in prayer before we start. Heavenly Father, we ask you to be with us in this service tonight.

We know that as we are gathered here together, you are amongst us and we pray that by your spirit you will be touching each heart. And Lord, that we will hear from you and that we will come to know you better.

And for those perhaps that do not know you yet through Jesus Christ, that they will come to know you. Whom to know is perfect freedom and joy and peace. And we do pray for each person here tonight, Lord, that we can put aside the cares of the world and concentrate on you and know you and worship you.

[1 : 27] We pray for those who are not here, that cannot come here tonight because of sickness or bereavement or whatever it might be. Those who are outside of the church who have no desire to come tonight.

Those perhaps who are frightened to come for one reason or another. We pray for them. We ask, Lord, that you touch their lives. And we pray for all the other denominations that meet tonight who worship you also.

And we pray that you will be close to them. And so, Lord, continue with us now as we lift our hearts and as we sing our praises to you. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. Our reading tonight is taken from John chapter 20, beginning at verse 19.

That's the Gospel of John chapter 20, beginning at verse 19, up to the end of the chapter.

[2 : 34] 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.

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then 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 to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld. Now Thomas, one of the twelve, 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 side, I will never believe.

[3 : 44] 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've 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. Amen. We're going to turn again to that passage of scripture, which we looked at just now.

[4 : 44] John chapter 20, beginning at verse 19. John 20 verse 19. I'm just going to say a wee prayer before we start.

Lord, we need you to help us as we look at this, your word. Lord, we ask you to be with us, to speak to each heart, to bring fresh things from your word, by your spirit, to our hearts, that we may serve you better and know you better through Jesus Christ.

Amen. I knew that this is probably the right passage to choose because I'd chosen it a while back.

But then Roddy Morrison spoke on the preceding verses last week beautifully about when Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and met with Jesus.

And then Cammy spoke on the few verses before that on Wednesday. So it's obviously meant to be. So here we are. It's a wonderful passage of where Jesus appears to his disciples.

[5 : 49] And as always on a Sunday, we're celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. Last week, we heard all about Mary Magdalene meeting with Jesus at the tomb and then Peter and John going to the tomb.

And we read that they had gone to the tomb and found it to be empty. And we read from verse 8 and 9 that John believed.

We don't know exactly what he understood, but he believed. But that they still didn't understand the Old Testament scriptures about Christ rising from the dead. And we read, therefore, in verse 19 that the disciples, this is where we start from tonight, were locked in a room.

So you have here ten disciples locked in a room, fearful and uncertain of what had really happened. They were still puzzled and they were in deep grief still.

They were afraid of the authorities and they were locked in. And they're scared and they're traumatized. They'd been through a terrible time. They'd seen what had happened to Jesus.

[7 : 05] They'd seen their master, their lord, their friend, scourged, beaten, and then crucified and killed in the most terrible way. And they were fearful.

And perhaps thought maybe that they would come to the same end. They were still puzzled. They are people who knew everything about Jesus that a close friend could know.

But they're powerless. And they're unable to do anything because they've not yet met with the risen Jesus. Maybe there are people in the church here tonight who've not met with the risen Jesus Christ.

Are you feeling scared? Are you feeling powerless? A bit like those disciples. Perhaps you know a good deal about Jesus. But you've not really met him in his risen form in your life.

And if you've not met him and you've not experienced the risen Jesus in your life. Then you too, I too, will be powerless and very uncertain. And sometimes quite scared of what the future is.

[8 : 19] Just like those disciples. And then we read in verse 19 that Jesus appears. The doors were locked. They were in fear of the Jews.

And we read, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, Peace be with you. Now it's fascinating, isn't it? There's no reprimand. There's no word about the way they'd run away.

Some of them had denied him. They'd not behaved well. There's no reprimand. On the contrary, these very first words are peace. Peace be with you.

And this word for peace means a total well-being. A peace that only God can give us. It's a beautiful peace. Now some people, maybe you're one, think that if they really did meet face-to-face with Jesus, he would be quite angry.

He might show them a list of their sins. Think of the mess of our lives. How would he react? And the disciples had every reason to fear rebuke.

[9 : 26] They were far from perfect. But the first words of Jesus are a peace. And the same is true if you seek him and come to know him. One of the defining characteristics of an encounter with Jesus is a sense of peace.

And it's not just a statement of Jesus. He's actually giving peace to his disciples. He's even commanding it. If you look at the words, Peace be with you.

And it's a sort of peace that we cannot work up. It's supernatural. We read in Philippians 4, 7, And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

He then shows them the marks of his crucifixion, if we read that in verse 20. The other Gospels state that he also ate some food in front of them. And all of this was to prove to them that he was real and he was not some apparition, some ghost.

And we read then that the disciples were overjoyed. The ESV, I think, is a bit weak on this because it says the disciples were glad.

[10 : 40] Well, the word, I understand, is much more like joy. It's an overwhelming joy, if you like. And you can imagine, they were so terrified, they were shaking, they were frightened, uncertain, puzzled.

And then they suddenly realize, he's alive. This is him. It's a wonderful, wonderful moment. They were filled with joy.

The Amplified Bible describes this saying, They were filled with joy, delight, exaltation, ecstasy, rapture. We have to imagine this group of grown men breaking down in tears of joy.

That's the sort of joy that we have here. And we remember what Jesus said in John chapter 16. A little while and you'll see me no longer. And a little while you will see me.

He predicted all of this. He prophesied it. The disciples at that time didn't understand him. And he said to explain, Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.

[11 : 45] You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. And then later in the same chapter, I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice. And no one will take your joy from you.

No one will take your joy from you. Once they'd seen Jesus, that joy stayed with the disciples. Likewise, we too can and should have such joy.

It cannot be taken from us. And that is his promise. And then Jesus bestows peace again in verse 21. He says, Peace be with you the second time.

In fact, in these few verses, we read that he gives his peace three times in verses 19, 21, and 26. Jesus understands their fear and their anxiety.

Just as he understands your worries and my worries and anxieties. He's constantly reassuring them. Are you anxious and fearful tonight?

[12 : 47] He understands this. He wants to give you his peace. And we can all receive it. And then we have this great commission.

He says, Peace be with you. And then he says, As the Father has sent me, even so I'm sending you. This is a commission that's not just for the disciples in that room, but to the church.

It is our commission. Reminding us here that we are sent people. We're to go out into the world to preach the gospel. There's no point in just staying in church.

The work is out there. Outside of this church. And in verse 22, we read that he breathes on them the Holy Spirit, who they would receive in fullness on the day of Pentecost.

We're reminded that without the Holy Spirit in our lives from Jesus, we are absolutely powerless. In verse 23, he says, If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them.

[13 : 51] If you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld. Now, this does not mean that we ourselves forgive sins. Only God can do that. And the words, they are forgiven, are in the perfect tense.

They have been forgiven. It's a completed past action with results in the present. So when the church presents the gospel message of forgiveness of sins, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we proclaim that those who believe in Jesus have their sins forgiven.

Likewise, those who do not believe in him do not have their sins forgiven. So in these astonishing few words of 21 to 23, just three verses, we have the peace that Jesus gives us, the Holy Spirit that he gives us, the great commission of bringing the gospel to the world, and the fact of forgiveness of sins for those who believe.

And we could stop there and spend a lot of time just looking at those few things. But we'll move on because somebody is missing from this wee group of disciples. Where is Thomas?

Well, we don't actually know because it doesn't tell us where he was at that time. I like to think that he was one of those who needed to be alone for a while with his terrible grief.

[15 : 18] He was overwhelmed with sadness. Perhaps, therefore, he needed to mourn alone. And remember, Thomas was a very committed man. Remember how when Jesus was called to the dying Lazarus, Thomas had said, Let us also go that we may die with Jesus.

Remember, that was Thomas. And in verse 25, we read that he wanted physical proof of Jesus being alive. He said, I must see those wounds and touch them.

Now, Thomas surely stands for many people who find it very hard to accept the truth of the resurrection. It's okay if Jesus was a nice historical figure.

It's okay if he was a great person who did good things. But did he really rise from the dead? Is he alive? Thomas stands for many people who find that hard.

Interestingly, nowhere does the Bible condemn him for having this doubt. Maybe there are some here who doubt the resurrection. Note that one week later, I think it says eight days actually, Jesus comes back to them specifically to help Thomas.

- [16 : 35] Specifically. How did Jesus know about Thomas? He knew because he was with Thomas all along, even if Thomas had not seen him. Jesus knows our uncertainties and our fears. He's there for you, just as he was for Thomas. Isn't that an encouragement? He came specially for this doubter, so that he could help him. Verse 26.

Jesus returns because he knew Thomas desired so much to see him. We read in verse 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. Do you desire, like Thomas, to meet up with Jesus?

Do you really want to meet up with him, like Thomas did? Thomas was determined to meet him. He so badly wanted to meet him. And is that our desire as well?

- [17 : 43] Because Jesus does always answer that. Always. Jesus returned because Thomas desired so much to see him.

Jesus said, Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened. Come unto me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

He's calling all of us. All of us. Thomas had doubts, but he was desperate to meet with Jesus. So how much do we desire the same?

Sometimes our desire for him is weak, if we're honest. We become self-sufficient. Things are going all right. It's fine. Maybe we attend church.

We do all the right things. We need to ask for such a desire to be in our hearts and actively seek him. And we see in verse 26 again those words of peace so badly needed in our lives.

- [18 : 44] When I came to faith in 1982, it was the peace, a supernatural sort of peace, that really struck me at the time.

Not something you can work up, beyond all understanding. We can lose that peace as Christians sometimes, and we can be tested. But it is always available as we come back to him.

Now, he tells Thomas to touch the wounds. He says, come and put your hand here. Put your finger in here. We don't know for sure whether Thomas does or not.

It doesn't tell us. Most commentators think he didn't need to. There is enough just to see Jesus, to have him speak to him, to see him there standing before him. And then Thomas makes this wonderful declaration.

My Lord and my God. And this is the only time in the Gospels that someone calls Jesus God. It's a wonderful statement of praise and belief.

- [19 : 47] So here we have the doubter kneeling before Jesus and saying, my Lord and my God. Isn't that a wonderful thing? How people can be transformed by meeting with Jesus. And so if you're struggling with doubts, take heart.

Thomas was the same. And he ended up absolutely full of faith. Now, tradition has it, and there's a lot of evidence for this, that Thomas was the apostle to India, a long way away from Jerusalem.

The church in South India traces its origin to Thomas, the doubter, who after he met with Jesus, went to the ends of the earth to tell people about him.

And you know, there is a dividing line. We can accept Jesus as a living Lord, risen from the dead, who wants to meet with us. Or we can reject this.

It's not really something we can sit on the fence about. What are the implications of him rising from the dead? There are many, but here's a few.

[20 : 55] Firstly, he has paved the way for our resurrection. We can now know that death has no sting. We can have confidence in the afterlife, because he has removed death as an obstacle.

Secondly, he is a living saviour. Not some long-dead hero, but a living Lord with whom we can have a relationship.

Thirdly, he has defeated Satan. All the horrors of the cross did not end with his death. He bore our sins, died, and then rose victoriously.

Fourthly, we can have confidence in God's mighty power in our lives. Paul said in Philippians 3, I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.

And he says in Ephesians 1.19, his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead.

[22 : 00] And indeed, if God raised Jesus from the dead, what can he not do? We should have much more faith in our prayers. Fifthly, above all, the resurrection means that Jesus is who he says he is.

Lord and God. And so Thomas cried out, My Lord and my God. And like Thomas, we have to seek him actively.

We have to worship him as Lord and God. Perhaps there are some here tonight who have not done that, or need to do this again, to do it afresh, to kneel before Jesus, and simply worship him from your heart, as Thomas did.

Funnily enough, we actually know more about the resurrection than Thomas did. He, of course, sought Jesus in the flesh, but we have so much more evidence for the resurrection.

We might say, How come? One of the best legal brains in the world, the former Chief Justice Lord Darling, wrote the following words about the resurrection and its evidence.

[23 : 10] In its favor, he wrote, as living truth, there exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true.

Now, why did he say that? Now, we definitely don't have a lot of time here tonight. But one can at least look at the main objections that people have to the resurrection, if you ask people to think about it.

The main objections. Firstly, some would say Jesus didn't actually die on the cross, that he came down and recovered. You can counter that very quickly by saying the Romans knew exactly how to kill people on the cross.

They never made a mistake about that. Another objection is the authorities stole the body for some reason and took it away.

You could counter that. They would have produced it immediately when there were claims of resurrection from the Christians. They said, that's a note of nonsense, here he is.

[24 : 24] A third objection is the disciples stole the body to pretend that he had risen. But look at their lives afterwards, which shows this to be complete nonsense.

They would not have lived a lie and died for it as they did and proclaimed absolutely man for man that he had done this for them and they'd seen him.

And in fact, Paul says that over 400 people had seen him after he had risen from the dead. But the greatest evidence for the believer is surely the reality. This is what's for me, certainly.

It's the reality of knowing Jesus and having a relationship with him. That's the wonderful evidence. Let's look at verse 29. I'm just going to read this.

It's a beautiful verse. Jesus said to him, that's to Thomas, have you believed because you've seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

[25 : 30] Now, none of us here have seen Jesus in the flesh. Most of us, I imagine here, believe. This is a lovely beatitude.

It's like the other beatitudes. Blessed be those. And one commentator says, this is the last and greatest beatitude. It's the persistent treasure of the church.

And if you're a believer tonight, may this truth of Jesus, risen from the dead, be an eternal encouragement and bring great joy. Seek, if you haven't done so already, to have a real meeting with the risen Jesus.

If you're holding back from doing that, please don't. There's only one way, one truth, and one life. Jesus, our risen Savior.

Put your trust in him. Say with Thomas, my Lord and my God. So we see that Jesus wants to be seen and for us to know him, risen and alive.

[26 : 40] He gives us his peace. He turns our sadness into joy. He understands our doubts. He comes to us as he did with Thomas when we desire to know him.

And he transforms us then as he did with Thomas. Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank you for these wonderful words of Scripture.

They ring so true. And just imagine those frightened and puzzled disciples needing that peace that you gave them as you appeared to them.

And the joy that they had when they recognized it was you. And the way you looked after Thomas, you took care of him. You didn't condemn him.

You showed yourself to him as he desired so much. You transformed him just as you can transform us. Lord, we are weak. We are sinful. We can do nothing in ourselves.

[27 : 43] We desire to meet you again tonight and each day. and we pray that you'll work mightily in our hearts through Jesus Christ. Amen. Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and evermore.

Amen.