

A Hopeless Sceptic

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[0 : 0 0] in the book of John and we've said every week we've been reading through those last two verses you just heard then that the real purpose of John writing this gospel and particularly for him writing down these accounts of Jesus miracles was that so that we would read them and that we would believe that he is the Christ the son of God and that we would have life in his name and we've seen haven't we over these weeks that as people come into contact with Jesus they're changed in such a way that they confess him to be their God and they have life in his name not just life in this life but eternal life in the life to come and so we're going to see that again tonight with Thomas each week we've really been focusing in mainly on the people that have encountered Jesus and how they have responded to him and tonight it's our good buddy Thomas so I'm going to pray for us and we'll get to work so let's pray father thanks for this book of John thanks for this series that you've taken us through and just highlighted for us the way that Jesus has changed lives from this point up until now we pray tonight as we pray every week that there would be people here who hear these words of yours and are changed by Jesus prayed in his name amen

I got to catch up this week with a really good friend of mine been a friend for about 10 years I only see him once every few years but he's a guy who is from Wellington New Zealand it's a really fun guy and we worked in the USA together for a couple of years and he's a great guy but but not someone who who has a living and active faith in Jesus right now and if you're hearing this now Phil I love you and I hope you don't mind me using you as an example so Phil Phil we got to chatting sitting down at Fed Square a couple of days ago and he was telling me about you know life and how life was good and I asked him how his his faith life was going and he was really frank with me and said that you know since we work together in the states he hasn't really given it much thought and really in his words he's kind of fallen away from faith in Jesus and I asked him why that was and he said the main reason was just that he has so many doubts just got a lot of doubts about the validity of the bible the testimony in the bible he has a lot of doubts about the exclusivity of faith in Christ and he says that not many people have been able to or willing to talk to him about these doubts

I think that's just such a common thing today for our generation to be just so saturated in doubt and it's really affects every aspect of our lives if you talk to a young person if you talk to someone probably under the age of 30 there is so much doubt I got asked I was part of a panel I don't know how I got on this panel it was many years ago but I was on a panel for a youth ministry conference and they asked me as part of this Q&A; why do you think that there aren't many young people responding to our evangelistic attempts our evangelistic services and our rallies and our conferences why aren't they coming to faith and my answer was that I thought that young people had been lied to so so many times so often had been promised so much and delivered so little that they weren't willing to risk responding to our offer I think that's so true we see it today I mean you just get promised so much in advertising you watch a few adverts I mean you're told that if you I don't know if you buy links deodorant beautiful women are going to be falling over themselves to be with you right doesn't matter how ugly you are or how little money you have and we buy these products in response to that and then we're disappointed when it doesn't happen it happens in less humorous ways doesn't it so much marketing so many salesmen and we've heard it all before we're getting a little bit sick of being disappointed

I think it's even happening in the scientific field where once maybe our parents grandparents in the modern era had so much certainty in science scientific fact now I think that certainty is starting to break up a little bit there are so many new findings and so many new ideas how can we be sure that what we're told today is still going to be true tomorrow and so we have within us this natural kind of doubt this failure to put our trust in anyone anything it touches the religious world as well I mean so many people are sold a false bill of goods and buy it up and then are only disappointed when it turns out to be just a new flash in the pan cult we saw this didn't we earlier this year with uh what was it Harold Camping May 21 Jesus returns right a lot of people bought into that I mean literally people sold everything they had gave up everything to be part of this cult that eventually let them down I'm sure there's a new a new forecast for when Jesus is going to return and there are going to be new followers for that but all it does is really add fuel to our doubt doesn't it how can we be sure how can we trust what these guys are telling us about this or that thing and it's true as I said of the religious world as well so it's good tonight to meet someone we can relate to in the gospel of John to meet Thomas we call him doubting Thomas he's one of our guys he's a 21st century guy he's a he's a post-modern kind of guy he's very reluctant to put his trust in anything or anyone maybe he's burned been burned a few many times maybe as I think we're going to see he just has a very scientific very cynical mind but he's one of our guys we kind of see ourselves in him and so it's cool that we get to have a look at him tonight see how he's changed by Jesus

I thought the way we could do it is just have a look at how John portrays Thomas in his gospel John seems to have a particular interest in Thomas kind of focuses in on a couple of incidents that are peculiar to this gospel I think John really wants to show us who Thomas was and who he ends up becoming so we're going to have a look at that you have to follow with me in your Bibles I'll read these for you just a couple of snapshots of Thomas from the book of John so last week Chris preached a great sermon for us didn't he about resurrection it was the account of Lazarus Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead and in that chapter chapter 11 verse 16 you've got the disciples with Jesus they've just found out that well they've known that Lazarus is sick and they've just found out that he's now dead and we get an insight into the kind of person that Thomas is Jesus comes to them and says listen Lazarus Jesus' good friend most probably their good friend as well he's dead so what we're going to do is we're going to go to Bethany and presumably to comfort Mary and Martha his sisters and to comfort them and care for them and this is Thomas' pastoral response

[7 : 47] I'll go from verse 14 Jesus told them plainly Lazarus has died I'm glad for you that I wasn't there so that you may believe but let's go to him then Thomas said to his fellow disciples let's go so that we may die with Jesus that's his pastoral response what an upbeat positive optimistic kind of guy that we've got here in Thomas there's just absolutely no sentiment for Lazarus for his death no concern for Mary and Martha he just thinks we're going to Bethany that's near Jerusalem that's where the bad guys are we're all going to die that's the kind of guy he is very very practical very pragmatic very plain in what he understands the path to be ahead of them he's hard headed he's cynical he's scientific very pragmatic alright so next one we're going to look at is John 14 the context here is that Jesus is kind of trying to let his disciples know that he's going to die they're in the upper room together and he's just saying to them listen I'm going to go away

I'm going to die you can't follow me yet but I'm going to go and prepare a place for you and then I'm going to come back and get you and take you to be with me so he's kind of comforting them he's reassuring them he's telling them that they can trust him and so he says I'm going I'm going to come back and you know the place that I'm going to and then Thomas butts in and says verse 5 we don't know where you're going how can we know the way again very very down straight down the line Jesus is trying to reassure them he's trying to partially care for them Thomas butts in well I don't know what you're talking about I don't know where you're going we don't know where the way is can you just explain it in more detail for us this is the scientific mind at work right it's it's facts it's deduction it's if I don't understand I need more information this is why

I was useless at maths and science at school because I never asked those questions right I was a kid in class who wasn't I mean it was another language and I wasn't going to put my hand up and ask the questions and that's why I failed right these scientific people ask questions more and more questions I need to know I need to know how it works it's that kind of engineering mind I need to know the nuts and bolts and that's what Thomas says to Jesus now we don't know the way give me more detail and so really in doing that he elicits one of the most famous statements out of Jesus in the entire Bible remember from John 14 we don't know the way and so Jesus said to him in response Thomas I am the way I am the truth and I am the life no one comes to the Father but through me and so there's a couple of snapshots of Thomas from the book of John very hard headed very cynical very pragmatic a doubter at heart right he needs the facts he wants to know the science he needs to know the nuts and bolts and so we come to our passage tonight

John chapter 20 it should be on that sheet for you you can follow along with me I'm just going to draw out a couple of passages from that for us and particularly focusing on Thomas' interaction with the disciples and with Jesus alright so come to John chapter 20 and I think here you see just the climax of Thomas' cynical scientific doubting mind okay context here is that this is Jesus' resurrection has happened Jesus was raised from death after the third day he's going about and appearing to people particularly his disciples so that they would believe and so he's just appeared to ten of the disciples showed them his hands and his feet and they have responded with belief they believe that Jesus is risen this has actually happened so it's ten disciples obviously Judas is dead right he's betrayed Jesus he's dead now and Thomas where's Thomas that's the question doesn't really get answered but I'm a little bit like Thomas

I want to know where is he everyone else is in this room they're kind of together probably praying fasting doing that kind of thing Thomas isn't there and in my mind I see him kind of at home in his study just trying to figure out what the heck has happened right Jesus had this great plan they understood he was going to be the Messiah he was going to deliver them and now he's dead I just kind of see him like a kind of a Sherlock Holmes kind of moment just in his study doing the deduction do you know Sherlock Holmes you with me alright I love Sherlock Holmes alright the greatest detective of all time and he gets to the bottom of these cases by deducing what's happened so just to solve the mystery and I kind of see Thomas doing that going through his scientific mind trying to figure out how did this go wrong where has Jesus failed and so he misses out he's not in the room he doesn't see the risen Jesus Jesus so when the disciples come and tell him the good news he says verse 24 let's pick it up there it says one of the twelve

[13 : 29] Thomas called twin was not with them when Jesus came so other disciples were telling him we have seen the Lord but he said to them if I don't see the mark of the nails in his hands put my finger into the mark of the nails and put my hand into his side I will never believe that's doubting Thomas right that's the scientific minded Thomas and it's a gruesome thing if you think about he says I won't believe unless I can put my fist in his wounds that's what Thomas wants that's the kind of proof he wants you say that Jesus has been physically resurrected that it's really him that it's not just a ghost it's not an impersonator I want to put my fist in his wound in his side where the spear went in and if not there's no deal I'm not believing such a scientific mind he uses his senses he wants he wants to be able to by way of his senses tell that this is really Jesus

I want to see I want to touch that's the language he uses so Thomas isn't going to be taken in he isn't going to be fooled right his best friends are telling him seriously this is Jesus he's still not going to believe it he wants proof and I think you know it's kind of fair enough the other disciples got it right Jesus turns up to them shows them wounds hands feet they got to see him and so Thomas wants to see that too I think it's fair enough he's not going to be taken in and Jesus seems to kind of agree with him because he agrees to his conditions these are my conditions for faith and Jesus shows up and says alright let's do it John chapter 20 verse 26 and 27 after 8 days so about a week later his disciples were indoors again and Thomas was with them he's figured it out he's come to pay he's got closure he's with them again even though the doors were locked

Jesus came and stood among them and he said peace to you then he said to Thomas put your finger here and observe my hands reach out your hand and put it in my side don't be an unbeliever but a believer so Thomas gets what he wants gets to shove his finger in the wounds plunge his fist into the gaping hole in his side he gets to experience the risen Jesus in all his physicality he gets what he wants the question is why is Jesus obliging him in this why does Jesus come back and make a special effort just to show him that he really is physically resurrected what's the point I think there's a really big point to this I think Jesus wants him to know and I think he wants us to know tonight as Chris said last week that he really did physically historically bodily rise from death that that's actually important for us to believe

Chris said last week and he talked about 1 Corinthians 15 and also John chapter 11 that if we don't believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus we've got nothing if you don't believe that Jesus really did rise from death and he had a body a physical body with scars if you don't believe that you're not a Christian it's so important for us to believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus and here's why it's not enough to just believe in the teachings of Jesus it's not enough there are churches in this city and churches just down the road from here that will tell you all you need to do is believe the teachings of Jesus follow his example and that's really what Christianity is about it doesn't really matter if Jesus really was raised from death it's really the spirit of the resurrection that we want to tap into it doesn't really matter if he's still buried somewhere in Jerusalem it's just kind of the goodness of Jesus that we want to emulate and it's ridiculous the Bible makes it clear we need to believe in the physical bodily resurrection of Jesus and I think that's why he appears to them now and why he appears to Thomas in particular he wants us to believe that he really did rise from the dead you see in John's account you see

Peter and John and Mary and the other disciples and they all know the teaching of Jesus they've been with him for three years they've heard every word that he said and yet when he dies they're demoralized and if he had stayed dead they probably just would have dissolved we never would read about them we wouldn't know their names probably it's the resurrection that makes all the difference the physical bodily resurrection that makes all the difference it's what turned them from people who are grieving and without hope into bold apostles of Christ and missionaries and church planners that's the difference we're told historically that Thomas went on to go to India as a missionary and was martyred there for his faith what took him from being in his study trying to figure out what went wrong and doubting that Jesus had died and said that Jesus had risen and saying that he would only believe if he got to plunge his hand in his side what happened to take him from that to a missionary martyr it was the physical resurrection it makes all the difference don't leave here tonight just believing the teachings of Jesus leave here tonight believing in the resurrection of Jesus makes all the difference so the question is where are you at are you kind of just using

[20 : 04] Christianity as a life philosophy or following Jesus because he's kind of a heroic figure of love and compassion and justice all those things are great we believe in love compassion and justice but it's all for nothing if he didn't rise from death it's nothing so let's see Thomas's response to this I'm telling you your response should be faith in Jesus and his resurrection let's see what Thomas does chapter 20 verse 26 and 28 after eight days just read reread this after eight days his disciples were indoors again and Thomas was with them even though the doors were locked Jesus came and stood among them he said peace to you then he said to Thomas put your finger in here and observe my hands reach out your hand and put it into my side don't be an unbeliever but a believer Thomas responded my lord and my god my lord and my god unbelief to belief on account of the resurrection of Jesus

Jesus Thomas sees the risen Jesus physical bodily resurrected Jesus and he falls down and worships him it's unequivocal isn't it my lord and my god he's changed forever he's changed by Jesus he'll never be the same so my question is have you been changed by Jesus resurrection is that where you've got your hope that just like Jesus was resurrected so you'll be resurrected when you die and Jesus returns the same thing for you guys I want a Thomas experience even for those of you who are doubters by nature even engineers that are here right the scientific guys the the cogs that are turning in your mind right now trying to figure out if what

I'm saying is true don't be an unbeliever but be a believer you might say to me in response well I'm not Thomas right I don't have Jesus in front of me if he was here and I could plunge my fist in his side maybe I believe in him too is that what you're thinking I don't have the risen Jesus in front of me so how can I believe Jesus got something to say to you tonight from this passage verse 29 he says to Thomas because you have seen me you have believed those who believe without seeing are blessed more blessed are those who believe in me without seeing now listen look at me just get this really clear Jesus is not saying more blessed are those who have blind faith in me who just believe in me without having any evidence in front of them he's saying blessed are those who have faith in me without sight not without evidence you see the distinction there blessed are those who have any evidence it's not blind faith

Christians get accused all the time of having blind faith of making illogical leaps without much evidence to base it on to put their trust in some god without any basis that's not what Jesus is commending and we would never commend that to you we don't want blind faith but we do want faith without seeing here's what I'm saying I can't make Jesus appear to you tonight he could if he wanted to he's done that in the past but I can't make him appear before you right now your faith in him has to be faith without seeing but not faith without evidence if you think about it you might react against that and say well I can't put my trust in something I can't see but we do this all the time you do this all the time a number of ways that you do this think about I don't know when you go to the doctor all right let's imagine you've gone to the doctor he sat you down and said listen I got some really bad news um you've got leukemia at that moment does your heart get torn in two does it go through you like a knife yes you don't say well I'm not going to believe you until you um show me cold hard evidence you don't you believe him he's a doctor he's a credible witness as a credible witness he's making this judgment based on solid evidence he's done the blood tests it's true you've got leukemia and that's what we're asking you to do with faith in Christ it's not blind faith that something might be there when you die now we're asking you to listen to the testimony of credible witnesses that their testimony is based on solid evidence compelling evidence and we're asking you to make a decision based on that credible witness solid evidence just like the doctor in this case we're talking about John he was there he saw the risen Christ his friends were with him hard-headed fishermen cynical people logical people and they believed they responded by giving their lives to this risen Jesus as we see at the end of this passage John writes down verse 30 and 31 that the whole reason he has written down this account he's written down this account he's written down this testimony is so that you would read it you would hear the words of a credible witness based on solid evidence and you would believe that Jesus is the son of God the Messiah and in believing you would have life in his name it's the whole reason he wrote it he's asking you to have the same faith in him that you have in your doctor it's not blind faith but it is faith without seeing blessed are those who believe without seeing now I get it I get it where so many of us are coming from I get that we've all been to a certain degree lied to over the years disappointed sold stuff by marketing agencies that are just really interested in our money and not interested in life

change of health well-being some of you have been misled by religious leaders bad pastors false religions and over time we tend to harden our hearts a little bit towards any truth that someone might offer us any hope that they might offer us and how much bigger hope can you have than the hope of a physical resurrection in a recreated creation that goes on forever without any death without any sickness without any crying without any loneliness it just seems like it's too good to be true but as jesus said to thomas our hope our prayer is that you would not be an unbeliever but you would be a believer our exhortation is not for you to put your trust in some kind of blind faith but to read the bible this is what god has given us this is his credible witness to solid historical fact about his son and his death and his resurrection he's given it to us so that we might read it investigate it and then come to a conclusion for ourselves friends this is a massive massive decision that you need to make it's an eternal it's a decision with eternal consequences so whatever you do don't don't make a decision based on secondary evidence don't base your decision on something that someone else has said a book that you read once an atheist author a friend a disenfranchised family member don't don't make any decision based on that go to the source make an informed decision read the bible for yourself maybe take john's gospel and read it through take a gospel like mark and read it through and see for yourself what these credible expert witnesses are saying about this man who claimed to be god who died in our place for our sin who was raised again for our salvation physically bodily historically as a forerunner for us that we would enjoy the same resurrection and eternal life with him i believe it with all my heart that's why i'm standing here you heard tonight adam he believes it too with all his heart he's convinced there are so many sitting here tonight who stand and sing and worship jesus because they know that he is right now ruling and reigning in heaven resurrected this is not just something that happened in a room in jerusalem 2000 years ago but it's happening right now jesus lives he lives today he's alive again and to us like thomas we say my lord and my god so with that in mind i'm going to pray to my lord and my god right now i'm going to pray to jesus and ask him just to help us as we come to terms with what we've heard tonight i'm going to pray and then we're just going to respond by singing our praises to god we're going to worship him so let's bow our heads pray together father you've been so gracious to us you've been so good to us

[31 : 56] you've loved us so well over the past few weeks going through this series you've really revealed yourself to us in powerful ways your spirit has been really at work in our hearts revealing to us who jesus was and is father we believe that jesus your son is the messiah the son of god and that in believing we have life in his name we have abundant life today and we have the hope of eternal life with you sure and certain hope thank you for having these accounts written down for us to encourage us thank you for giving us so much to base our faith on that it's not a blind leap but you've given us your word to show us who you are and who jesus is you've also given us the testimony powerful testimony of our brothers and sisters encourages us to follow their example of faith in you and father i know that we have precious people here tonight who who don't call themselves christians perhaps they're like thomas they're doubting we get that lord and we just ask that you would reveal yourself to them just as you did to thomas you reveal yourself to be the risen lord jesus their lord and their god father we pray that you'd do it even now because we know as christians that no amount of words that i speak can make any difference but your spirit saves us you give us faith you enable us to believe these expert witnesses enable us to put our trust in that evidence that they provide for us in your word so i pray that you do that in the hearts of the hearts of the people here tonight who don't yet believe in you because lord i really really want to spend eternity with a resurrected body that cannot die i want to do it with these friends here my brothers and sisters so would you do that for us now i pray may we never be the same after being changed by jesus tonight we pray it in jesus good name amen and now and that's it we pray and and we're and and