

John 20 v 24 - 29

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[0 : 00] If you'd like to find that portion of John's Gospel, John 20, that part that we read just a few moments ago, that will be helpful.

Back in 2008, in May, at the end of May 2008, there was the latest NASA launch of the Space Shuttle, which is now, of course, retired from Cape Kennedy.

And as usual, there were many thousands of people there gathered around, spectators, several, of course, either with cameras or camcorders, set up to record the launch, a once-in-a-lifetime probably experience.

One particular cameraman was very excited. He'd got there very early, and he'd positioned his camera very carefully, pointing at the launching tower.

And as the countdown from 10 could be heard, he put his eye to the eyepiece, as it were, to look through, to focus on, to get everything just right. And the loudspeakers, 10, 9, and as, of course, it got to three people as well, was shouting, three, and started to cheer and shout and so on and clap.

[1 : 17] But as he looked through the viewfinder, there was nothing happening. There was no spark, there was no flame, there was no ignition, there was nothing. It took him about three seconds to realize he was pointing at the wrong launching tower with his camera, and he managed to quickly, sort of hastily shift it around and just catch the end of the shuttle as it sort of disappeared in the clouds to space.

He'd been focusing on the wrong thing, and he nearly missed the whole event. Now, when we read through, particularly chapter 20 of John and these last verses, 24 and following, it's easy for us to get caught up with Thomas.

Of course, Thomas has long borne the stigma of being doubting Thomas, and everybody knows, even people who don't know who doubting Thomas was still use the phrase doubting Thomas. And it's easy for us to get caught up with thinking about him and his experiences and his character and so on, because, of course, he's so much like us.

He's a man of our own experience. He's a man who struggled, who had doubts, and we can associate with him in that way. But really, of course, whenever we come to the Bible and whenever we come to read, we're always looking for one person in particular, and we're meant to be focusing on that one person in particular, and that one person is always the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 44] As we said just at the very start of our service, here's Job, back 2,000 years before Christ came into the world, thinking about and looking forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so it's Jesus that I want us to think about here. It's Jesus who's the central character, and it's Jesus that we get to see more of through the experiences of Thomas.

But immediately, again, it's important for us to recognize that here is a man of weakness, here is a man of doubt. And we need to remember that our God is a God who does the impossible.

He's a God who deals with and works with failures. He's a God who deals with and works with people who are weak. And here's an experience and a situation where this weak and doubting disciple is able to bring about great blessing, or God, rather, is able to bring about great blessing through him.

We can say that in Thomas' failure, there's great blessing for us. In Thomas' weakness and doubts, there was great blessing for the disciples there, because of God, not because of him. And sometimes we can find ourselves very wrapped up in our own weaknesses, and we forget that our God is the God who can do and does do the impossible with the, well, the faulty, the failing.

[4 : 10] But there's one very practical lesson, isn't there? Before we come to Thomas, before we come to the Lord Jesus, as he meets with Thomas, there's something very practical here, very simple, really, we could say. And it's this, that to be absent from the meeting of God's people is to

deprive yourself of great blessing.

Because if we look what happened in verse 24, Thomas, one of the disciples, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. And he missed out big time, didn't he?

He missed out big time because he wasn't there when God's people were gathering together. Now, sometimes, of course, people will say, oh, you don't need to go to church to be a Christian, and, or, you know, you get all legalistic about church.

But that's completely wrong. Because when you realize that the Bible encourages us, teaches us, commands us to meet together, it's because God wants to bless us. And because the elders and the deacons and the pastor sort of brag our ears and say to us, get to church, don't miss out, it's not because they want to see the seats filled, not because they want the coffers filled, it's because they want you blessed.

Okay? So if I ever have a go at you about not being in church, it's because I want you blessed, I don't want you to miss out. But Thomas missed, he had a whole week of living with his doubts, a whole week of living with his fears, a whole week of confusion, simply because he wasn't there.

[5 : 28] Now, you could say, well, he may have had a very good reason not to be there. And he may have done, he may have had a golf match to play. You know, he may have had commitments with his family.

He may have had some work or something else like that. There may have been something good on the telly that night. But he missed out. And we may say, well, you know, I don't have to be there and I don't have to.

Fine. But in the end, you're missing out. Who knows when God will come and bless in a particular way? Who knows when Jesus will come in a special way in the midst of his people? To encourage, to bless.

That's why the Bible encourages us. Hebrews chapter 10 says, Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing. But let us encourage one another.

Let us encourage one another. So it's a very simple, practical thing. Not getting at anybody in any way, shape or form. It's a simple thing. When we miss out on the meeting of God's people, we miss out on blessing.

[6 : 28] But let's look at Thomas. Let's look at these events. And particularly the first event, the first Sunday after Easter. Here we are, the first Sunday after Easter. So these coincide with us today.

And we can see, as we look through this, something of Christ, something of his great love, his care, his patience, with weak and struggling and doubting believers like Thomas, like you and I.

And it's again so vital that we remind ourselves, though our Lord Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, and though he is now living in that resurrection body which has no pain, no weakness, no loss at all, yet he still empathizes, understands and sympathizes with us.

Though he is in heaven, in glory, he is unchanged in his feeling towards us. That's why again, Hebrews tells us this. We do not have a high priest, that's Jesus, who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses.

But we have one who's been tested, tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. Our Lord Jesus Christ, in his ascended, glorified, resurrection body, has not forgotten what it's like to live in this world, has not forgotten what it's like to struggle in this world, and to face the difficulties of this world, the temptations of this world.

[7 : 52] So what do we learn? What do we see? Well, let's look here at this episode, this event, particularly as I say, verses 26 and following, a week later, a week after Easter, disciples were in the house again, Thomas was with them, though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you.

And 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. And what do we see here?

We see here, something which is so, so wonderful, that I hope it will warm and encourage each one of our hearts. We see that no one is insignificant to Christ.

No one is insignificant to Christ. You see, the reason that he came that second time, that week later, was primarily for Thomas' sake.

Primarily for Thomas' sake. He came and revealed himself as a raised and living Lord Jesus for Thomas. Why do I say that? Because it's quite obviously clear, isn't it? When Jesus came the first time, on that Easter Sunday evening, we're told that he spoke to them, I'm sending you, he gives

them instruction, received the Holy Spirit, he breathed upon them, and he gives them instruction about forgiveness and so on.

[9 : 08] When he comes the second time, a week later, there's no teaching, there's no instruction, there's no giving of the Holy Spirit. He simply says to all of them, peace be with you. Then all of his attention is focused on Thomas.

All of his words are to do with Thomas. All of his actions are to do with Thomas. Yes, I'm sure that the other disciples were greatly encouraged, I'm sure they were greatly blessed to see Jesus again, and his great blessing for us as well.

But primarily, it was Jesus' love and concern for Thomas that brought him there to that place at that time. Now, we need to get hold of this, dear friends.

The Lord Jesus Christ, to him the individual matters. We are not numbers. We are not just members of a church. We're not just one among maybe a billion believers in this world at this time.

But we are individuals. We see that in his life. Wherever he went, he sought out individuals. It's the Samaritan woman at the well, an outcast from her own village because of her immorality.

[10 : 08] But there, Jesus goes to her. Why does he go to Samaria? Just for her. And then he goes out of Israel and he goes into Tyre and Sidon and he meets the Canaanite mother of a possessed girl.

And he goes there and the only person he meets out there is that one woman. Why? Because she mattered to him. And when he's going in the crowds into Jericho and there's blind Bartimaeus, it's to him that Jesus goes.

All the crowds are rushing around. To him he goes. The woman who had to bleed, it was her that he healed. Zacchaeus up the tree, it was to him that he spoke. Do you see? The individual mattered to Jesus. You matter to him.

Personally. The church is Christ's beloved bride. And every single part of that beloved bride is lovely to him, is precious to him, is dear to him.

Sometimes we can get caught up in the feeling that we are just one amongst many in this world.

You know, the attitude sometimes of people who are not Christians is, well how can God be interested in one person?

[11 : 14] How can God hear the prayer of one person when there's so many billions of people? Surely he can't do it. Yes he can because he's God. But more than that, he can do it because he is the God who loves and cares for and has a concern for his people.

You, dear friends, and I, like Thomas, are significant, important, vital to Jesus. And therefore, if I want to flip the side over, how much so should we be important to one another?

How much should we be important to one another? The one. This church is never, as far as I understand it, from people I've spoken to, been concerned about numbers. This church has always been involved and concerned about individuals.

The one person. Are we showing that love to one another? To the one. And I know I was pulling your leg a bit about not being there on a Sunday, but when somebody isn't there on a Sunday, are we able just to give them the phone or to pop round?

Not to say, where were you? To say, how are you? That's the other side of it, isn't it? We love one another. As Jesus gave us that commandment, love one another as I loved you.

[12 : 27] Each one is important. Each one is precious to him. But also we notice here as well, just as no one is insignificant, there is no place beyond Christ's blessing.

There is no place beyond his presence as well. We're told that, again a week later, that the doors were locked. Verse 26. They'd been locked the first Easter Sunday. The disciples were afraid. Afraid that those who had arrested Jesus and crucified him would come after them as Jesus' disciples and arrest, maybe and crucify, or do something horrible with them. And so they kept the doors locked.

They were afraid. And yet here, Jesus comes to them. You see, there's no barrier that can keep Jesus out. There's no place that can stop him from going to his people, to those that he loves, and blesses them.

Even unbelief can't keep him out. Even doubts can't keep him out. Even sin can't keep him out. We put up hindrances.

[13 : 32] We put up barriers in our minds, don't we, to where and how and what Jesus can do. We might say it about somebody else. We might say it. We don't say it. We might say it about certain

my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I'll not believe.

In one sense, he sets a challenge, doesn't he? A problem. I won't believe it unless I see it. He required physical evidence of Jesus' resurrection before he'd believe.

So what does Jesus do when he comes? What does Jesus do? Jesus came and stood amongst them. Peace with you, he said. 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. Do you see the parallel of the words with Jesus and with Thomas? Thomas says, unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger there where the nails were, Jesus says, put your finger here and see my hands.

[19:10] Thomas says, put your hand into my side. Sorry, Thomas says, unless I put my hand into his side, Jesus says, reach out your hand and put it into my side. Do you see? It's obvious, isn't it, that Jesus, though he wasn't visibly seen there that week before, he was there.

He heard everything that Thomas said. He heard the problem that Thomas was grappling with. He heard the difficulties. See, our doubts and our struggles, whether we voice them or whether we keep them to ourselves, they are known to Christ.

Those problems that we've been talking about, those barriers that we've put up, he knows all about them. He knows exactly what the problem is. He knows exactly why your heart is locked. He knows exactly why you're struggling. He knows exactly the situation that you're in.

But here's the wonderful thing, that Jesus will come and give to us exactly what we need, just as he did for Thomas.

He'll give to us exactly what we need. It may not be what we want. Okay, I have to stress that. It may not be what you want. You may say, well, I want this. But Jesus will give us what we need because he knows us better than we know ourselves.

[20:20] But isn't that, isn't that amazingly humble of the Lord Jesus? When you think about it, if it had been you and me, if I can put it that way, in that situation where somebody had doubted us and said, I won't believe, we'd have said to them, you know, who do you think you are not believing?

Who do you think you are not trusting in me? We'd have been quite angry, wouldn't we? We would have been quite condemnatory of Thomas. In fact, probably we have been in the past, in the history of the church, we condemn Thomas.

We said, oh, he's doubting Thomas. Don't be like him. But we are just like him. We do have doubts.

The reality of faith is this, that you can only have faith if you've got doubts.

You can have doubts without faith, but you can't have faith without doubts. Because that's exactly what faith is. It's overcoming doubts. It's dealing with doubts. It's working through doubts. Don't let anybody say to you, don't let anybody think here that because you're a Christian that you don't ever have doubts.

Of course you do. But faith overcomes them. Faith triumphs over them. Faith defeats them. Faith meets those doubts head on. The world likes to portray Christians as non-thinkers.

[21:29] The world likes to portray Christians when they speak about evolution or speak about the Big Bang or speak about any of these things or reality. Oh, you're just all brainwashed. You don't think for yourselves. Yes, we do.

We look at those things that are thrown out. We look at those doubts and we work them through and we come to a place which says it must be the case that God is the creator. Faith is not blind faith.

It's educated faith. It's thinking faith. So here's Jesus. He comes and he gives to Thomas exactly what he asks.

Now we've got to be very careful here and I need to add this caveat in that sense, this warning in that sense. We've got to be very careful we don't presume upon this aspect of Christ's gentle character. We mustn't become of such a hard heart that we say unless Jesus does what I want I won't believe in him.

You see, many people have done that insisted upon perhaps physical proof or visible proof when actually they've got no intentional desire to believe at all. There were those who were gathered around the cross of Jesus particularly those religious leaders and Mark tells us that they mocked him and they said to him come down from the cross that we may see and believe.

[22:44] They had no intention of believing in him. They had no intention of trusting. Even if he had come down from the cross which he could have done quite easily they still wouldn't have believed in him.

They'd seen all the miracles he'd done how he'd raised the dead to life. They'd seen all of those things but that wasn't going to affect them. They weren't going to change. They weren't going to believe. See, there's a vast difference which Christ alone can judge between struggling faith and sinful unbelief.

There's a big difference between the two. He knows it. He sees it. He knows where we're just struggling and wanting to believe and work it through and between when we're sinfully unbelieving and saying I will not believe it.

It doesn't matter what you say or what you do you're not making me a Christian. And dear friend let me say to you that's a very dangerous place to be. a very dangerous place to be.

To be sinfully unbelieving. But you see here and I want us again to concentrate on the very positive here. Here we see somebody who's struggling with their faith and Jesus giving them what was needed to strengthen their faith and confirm their faith and bring them through into a place of assurance and confidence.

[24 : 00] Stop doubting and believe. No problem is unsolved whatever your problem is dear friends whatever it is that's holding you back that you're struggling with then give it to Christ come to Christ.

He's the one who can solve it. He's the one who can answer it and only him. And then we see as well dear friends that no Christian is so weak that Christ cannot be glorified through them.

No Christian is so weak that Christ cannot be glorified through them. What's Thomas' response when he sees Christ and hears his words? Stop believing stop doubting and believe. Thomas said to him my Lord and my God come from the mouth of this doubting struggling weak failing disciple comes this wonderful declaration of the glory and the deity of Christ my Lord and my God.

None of the other disciples had said that of him. They'd seen him on that first Sunday and they'd been amazed and wondered and seen that he was alive but none of them had said what Thomas said my Lord and my God.

Thomas did though. Even earlier on when Peter we're told by God the Father was able to say of Jesus you are the Messiah the Christ the Son of the Living God it's still not quite this is it?

[25 : 15] To ascribe to Jesus my God it's not it's not an expletive like people say all the time OMG it's not that at all it really is you're my God you're my God bang suddenly in his brain there's this great kapow where it all becomes so real and clear this one who's created the world this one who went all the way through the Old Testament in the wilderness and brought the people out of Egypt and brought them into the promised land it's you it's you it's you it's you and he gives to Jesus this sweet praise this unrivaled honour which no one else had given you see this is the great thing about our God he likes using the weak he likes using the fragile he likes using the broken to bring glory to himself here's what Paul writes about the Christians in Corinth and about us as well of course

God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong he chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him God has chosen you and I that we are weak that we're failing that we're foolish that we're sinful because he is able to bring greater glory and honour to himself because it's all of God one of the reasons perhaps that many people do not want to trust Christ is because of pride I don't want to admit that I need him I don't want to admit that I'm weak or that I'm foolish or that I'm sinful I don't want to admit that I've got a pride in myself dear friends one of the first things that happens to us when we become a Christian is we realise just what we're like we not only have a kapow moment about Jesus we have a kapow moment about ourselves that says oh I really am sinful and selfish and greedy and foolish person and here's Jesus he takes Thomas this foolish and doubting and weak and in one sense despised person and he brings out from his lips this incredible praise and glory and honour and it goes on from there church history tells us it was Thomas who went across to India and brought the gospel to India in that first century after Jesus was raised from the dead do not think dear friends that because you struggle in your Christian life and because it is tough and because you don't do all the things that you should do that means that you are written off by Christ and do not think because you've cocked it up once twice ten times that means you are written off by Christ

God is pleased to take and to use the sinful and the failing and the weak and the doubting for his glory if you are willing to be used by him all through the Bible I love the Bible because it is so very plain and simple and it doesn't cover up it's no airbrushing in the Bible about people's characters you get Abraham father of the faith lies because he's afraid you get Moses keeps losing his temper all the time you get David taken away with lust Peter fear of what people will think of him popularity

keeps boasting all the time Thomas the doubter and through church history you get the Luther and the Calvin and the Wesley and the Spurgeon and the Whitefield and the Dr. Mark and they're all weak men and women they're all failing they all have their Achilles heel yet God used them and worked through them and brought glory to his name and you can add your name to that list as well and so can I you're no write-off with Christ you're never you're never ever too past bringing glory and honour to him so don't let the devil tell you that don't let him keep holding you back don't let him keep saying to you well you know you blew it you mucked it up and look at you now look at you now do you really think that Christ can use you will you tell the devil yes he can not because of who I am but because of who Christ is see again the focus we focus on ourselves we get it all wrong focus on Christ we get it all right we look at ourselves weak and stupid and foolish and failing and struggling look at Christ he's great he's strong he's mighty he's brilliant he's wonderful he's gracious he can do it one last thing and this is where everything comes together no physical sight of Christ can bring the blessing of true faith look what Jesus says to Thomas he receives that ascription of praise and glory verse 28 and he says to Thomas this because you've seen me you've believed blessed are those who have not seen and have yet believed blessed are those who've not seen now we might wish that we could have been there on that night we might wish that we could have been a fly on the wall in one sense and seen Jesus alive from the dead we say well I'll never have any struggles again

I'd never doubt again if I could see Jesus what does Jesus say Jesus says quite the opposite he contradicts our thoughts he says those of you who've not seen me but believed in me you're more blessed you're more blessed Thomas was Thomas saw and believed but he says blessed are those who've not seen and believed those who put their faith in Christ for who he is and trusted in him are those who are blessed you see there's a great principle that runs all the way through the Bible a great principle that affects Christian living and it's simply this we live by faith not by sight we live by faith not by sight faith that looks at the physical for support faith that depends upon what they can touch and see and hear and feel is always a faith which is weak always a faith which will fall down at the first hurdle because as soon as that human faith meets something painful as soon as that human faith meets something which is difficult it immediately says where's God and it's nowhere

I'm sure we've had that experience ourselves but faith in Christ alone which doesn't rely on whether everything is going well for us faith in Christ alone that relies not upon whether we feel happy or we feel that he's near us is a faith that is strong that remains that's unmovable that can face anything and go through anything John as he writes his letter 1 John in chapter 1 he says this to the Christians there this is the victory that has overcome the world even our or your faith whoever it is that overcomes the world sorry who is it that overcomes the world only he who believes that Jesus is the son of God in other words he's saying you can have the whole world against you if you have faith in Christ that real faith that depends upon who he is upon what he's done and not on yourself or anything else that can overcome the world it's stronger than the world and so Paul says himself as well as he writes about the struggles and trials that he goes through he says this so we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen in other words the heavenly the spiritual the real for what is seen is temporary this world and what we feel and touch but what is unseen is eternal faith that's what the key to life is it's faith it's simply

[33 : 28] I will trust in you I will trust in you how can our faith increase simply this by looking at Jesus the more we look at Jesus the more we consider him the more we think about who he is the more we read his promises the more we understand what he's done for us what he's accomplished for us the more we shall know his blessings and the more we shall know that faith that keeps and sustains and brings us through when some of the Greeks came to Philip they said to him Lord we want to see Jesus Lord we want to see Jesus is that your prayer and mine in all that's going on in all the hullabaloo that's going along in all the turmoil that's going on in the storm that's going on in all the weaknesses that we face look at Jesus look at Jesus and we shall find that he is the one who deals with us just as Thomas with tenderness and grace and mercy and yes amazing and incredible he's even able to bring glory and honour to himself through us well let's sing our final hymn this morning it's that glorious hymn that glorious Easter hymn 281 thine be the glory risen conquering son endless is the victory thou oh death hast won let's stand and sing of Jesus our living

Saviour our hearts What's true by here which is the glory that determines the power of the heaven and the best The█ of the Song CHOIR SINGS

CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS Thank you.
Thank you.
Thank you.