

Intro - Open to John 20:24-31

The human race is known for its ability of reason and creativity. This is part of what separates us from the rest of creation. A dog is not concerned about what it means to be a dog. Yet a human cannot help but ask the question “Why do I exist?” Now, the fact that we have the ability to reason does not mean we use it. That is where the creativity part comes in. We can clearly see what is right, yet we seem to choose the illogical and harmful choices for ourselves despite reason speaking otherwise. Why do we pick fights we cannot win? Why do we eat food that doesn’t nourish us? Why are we given evidence, but ignore it anyway?

Romans 1 says that the truth about God is seen plainly in creation. More generally biblical revelation doesn’t read like fiction. It reads like the historical narrative it is because it takes care to note historical geography, dates, times, and people. The fact that it is ancient means that not everything lost to time can be recovered but I hope we see in John’s gospel is the ring of authenticity which God uses so that we may believe. **The evidence God provides can lead us out of tragedy and into triumphant eternal life.**

Pray

One – Tragedy of Death

Read John 20:24-25

Not many of the disciples get attention in the gospels. Thomas gets the spotlight three times in John’s gospel. In John 11 he is willing to follow Jesus back into Judea where Jesus’ ministry has made enemies. He convinces the disciples, “**let us also go, that we may die with him.**” A bold declaration of love and commitment to Jesus. In John 14 when Jesus says he is going away, Thomas asks, “**Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?**” He wants to go with Jesus yet again. Follow him wherever it leads.

After Jesus’ death, Thomas knows he can’t follow. The resurrection predictions Jesus made are not yet understood to the disciples. So when Jesus is arrested and crucified, he may have been so lost in despair that he didn’t want to join the disciples on that Sunday night.

Notice that the testimony already given to Thomas so that he can come out of his funk and despair at the death of Jesus. They tell him, “**We have seen the Lord.**” It is an eyewitness claim that Jesus is really alive and it is on this basis, that God has revealed Christ’s appearing.

Thomas’ despair was one focused on death much like Mary Magdalene’s from a few weeks ago. Jesus was gone beyond his reach. God’s anointed one had failed. I can imagine that he believed Rome, corrupt courts, demons and evil had won! Why should he hold out hope?

This is the deep tragedy of sin. That even in the face of loving testimony, of friends which tell us life is possible, we will cling to death in unbelief. Sin blinds us in unbelief and unrepentance. If you have friends and family that cling to unbelief it’s easy to be frustrated at their sin. We must not be frustrated with them. We must love them because they are dead. **We are dead in our trespasses and sin**, Ephesians 2, and without divine intervention it will stay that way.

Yet, what do the disciples who saw Jesus do? They testify to what they have seen, touched. Thomas’s response makes sense to me:

I want the same proof. Unless I see his hands and side. Place my hands physically in them. I will NEVER believe.

We are prone to give ultimatums, aren’t we? Something isn’t going our way and we throw down the gauntlet. This is my standard for obedience. This is my standard for belief. Unbelievers do this, but so do believers.

Thomas was wrong to reject the testimony of his friends. When we are starting into the waters of opinion and preference and feelings, we have to check those at the authority of scripture and be willing to say, “This is how I feel, now I need to know what scripture, my brothers and sisters in the church, and my pastors know is true in scripture.” Sin blinds us and when your pastor or brothers and sisters in Christ are telling you something, it may be time to open your eyes. You are not alone in this life Christ follower. You have others who love you and hold out the truth to you with the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit to point you to what you cannot see.

We cannot let the effects of sin blind us and keep us in tragedy and disappointment when the hope God offers is a loving testimony. So here is where it shifts. Tragedy to Triumph. The Triumph of the Resurrection.

Two – Triumph of Resurrection

Read John 20:26-27

Eight days later where are the disciples? Back under lock and key, fearful but now Thomas is with them. The disciples were fearful but John is showing us how Jesus works in his resurrected body. He doesn't walk in, he doesn't knock, he simply came, appeared as he did before and stood among them. Out of nowhere again, like last week saying, **“Peace be with you.”**

Notice how quickly he turns to Thomas. It's why he came. He is not trying to do another run at the same encounter, he is coming for Thomas to show him that he has not forgotten him and wishes help him believe.

These resurrection appearances to the apostles are so important. Do you know what makes an apostle different from every other disciple of Jesus? It's not their writing ability, although many wrote. It's not their preaching ability, although many preached. It's not their knowledge or training, although they had some.

It's their testimony of seeing the resurrected Jesus. Paul, on the road to Damascus became an apostle because he saw Jesus in his resurrection body. He was commissioned by God to be an apostle. Acts 9, incredible story.

The requirements to be an apostle are laid out in Acts 1. They were replacing Judas to make 12 apostles. Out of 120 people gathered, Peter quotes Psalm 109, **“Let another take his office”**. Then in verse 21, they list the requirements, that it be a man who accompanied them during Jesus' ministry on earth from the very beginning until the day when he was taken up from them, and then he says **“one of the men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”**

The apostles are the official God selected witnesses of the resurrected Jesus. It is upon this testimony God builds his church. This is why we cannot have any more apostles today; they must be a witness of the resurrected Jesus.

So here is where we get back to Thomas who is told by Jesus to **“put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side.”** Thomas is given the exact proof he asked for. It doesn't change that he should have believed his brothers, the other apostles. It does mean that God, in his love and mercy provided for Thomas the evidence he requested.

Jesus follows this immediately with the imperative command to **not disbelieve but believe**. It is on the proof of his resurrected body that Jesus calls Thomas out of tragedy into triumph. From death to resurrection life.

I am convinced that the increase in suicides and despair and mental illness in America has much less to do with any physical problems or unique trials of our age but has spiritual roots that run all the way to Adam and our sin nature. Many do not believe in the soul, or the God who created it. Many do not have hope for life beyond the grave or a God who has made us for eternity. Our sin has titled the world out of control and our rebellion pushes the angle.

Yet here is the triumphant appearance of Jesus. Resurrected. With a great command to believe in Him and the divine Lord that he is. That life beyond the grave is not just possible but is inevitable and resurrection can be ours. **DO NOT DISBELIEVE ANYMORE! BELIEVE ON JESUS.**

This is where the encounter hits its climax as Thomas' tragic doubt has turned to the triumph of belief.

Three – Triumph of Belief

Read John 20:28-29

Thomas' belief given by God begins in his heart and bursts out of his mouth as one of the greatest and highest praises of Jesus in the Bible. This is the climax of the book of John! **My Lord and my God!**

His Lord, his master. The one who owns and rules over him. His God, his supreme creator and sustainer in the flesh. The one who is deserving of all glory and honor as he conquers death and the grave.

This is the response deserved when Jesus comes to you. All throughout Jesus' ministry he claims to be the Messiah and God. Yet they reject and fail to believe his claims. Thomas does what others will not. He speaks the highest messianic and divine titles of God to Jesus.

When you encounter Jesus and his beauty, his glory, and his wonderful cross he must become your Lord and your God. The one you serve, the one you worship. Thomas' great love for Jesus was clouded by grief but the cloud break of belief gives him the clarity to speak that Jesus is both MY Lord and MY God.

Jesus receives the worship that Thomas offers and responds. It is rendered as a rhetorical question which is just a statement where the answer is implied. Thomas, **have you believed because you have seen me?** Jesus contrasts this with every other believer who will come after them.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

The late first and 2nd century Christians John writes to have never seen the resurrected Christ. But many would have known Thomas. John writes them now so that a warm joy tingles down our spine that Jesus speaks OF US.

What does it mean to be blessed? A blessing is a pronouncement that we are accepted by God. We receive a blessing that Thomas never had since he sees and believes instead of believing the testimony of his friends. Mary saw and believed. It is on their testimonies that we are given the blessing through the Holy Spirit as we are given ears to hear and a voice to respond to the good news and be blessed as we believe without seeing.

Peter writes about this blessing given to non-eyewitnesses. It was our scripture reading earlier. 1 Peter is a letter written to Christians under persecution and scattered far from Jerusalem and distant from the physical resurrection. He writes in chapter 1 verse 8:

⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

We share the love that Thomas had. He walked with Jesus, he saw Jesus die and rise again. This belief is triumphant with joy that as Peter says is inexpressible. The blessing is that what wells up inside us as God reveals himself to us in his word today. This morning, you are reading, understanding and I hope believing, that Christ is raised from the dead. Its joyful and glorious which Peter must use the word inexpressible to describe. It goes beyond what we can express but because of Christ, it is not beyond what we can experience. This experience is also tied to the outcome...

The salvation of our souls. This outcome is where we turn next.

Four – Triumph of Life

Read John 20:30-31

John steps out of the story right here to show us something important. The key words that help us understand the full triumph of the resurrection are the words “sign, written, and life”. We already talked about belief or to have faith but we cannot miss that John wrote his gospel about the signs that Jesus is the true Lord and God. If you go back through the first 12 chapters you find 7 signs that John marks out in Jesus’ miracles and ministry.

The first sign: the water turned to wine at the wedding in Cana.

The second sign: healing the nobleman’s son.

The third sign: healing the lame man.

The fourth sign: feeding the 5,000 and to escape the crowd

The fifth sign: walking on water

The sixth sign: healing the blind man and

The seventh sign: raising Lazarus from the dead

Each sign John marks out because Jews ask for signs to authenticate that he is from God. Jesus said in the midst of the second sign, that **“Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe”**. When Jesus finishes all seven signs Jesus says in John 12:37, **“Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him”** John is showing the Jews and Gentiles of his day that what is recorded for us in his gospel and in the rest of the gospels are the signs that despite their previous or current unbelief, Jesus is the Messiah and the ultimate sign is his resurrection.

These signs are not just real, they are recorded or written down. John tells us that we cannot contain all the miraculous and wonderful works of Jesus in print. But yet he chose these 7 signs, and 8 chapters of the passion week so that we may believe.

Notice, MAY believe. The evidence is sufficient for belief. Yet John knows, God knows, that not all will believe. We don’t just tell people about the miracles of Jesus and expect them to believe. It is the act of the Holy Spirit who shows you the depth of your sin, that your sin has sent Jesus to die, that he is the Messiah and God in the flesh. The miracles are the authentic witness of the greater truth that Jesus is what Thomas proclaimed, Lord and God. Yet, the word of God was written so that by believing in this testimony, that God’s word is true, we may have life.

Eternal Life. Not just breath in our lungs but we praise him for that too.

The testimony of the disciples, Thomas, John, Peter, Paul and the rest is that their name means nothing because life is about the name of Christ.

We are reading God's word not so that we can have a triumphant life here on earth, but much deeper and eternal than that is a triumphant eternal life in the name of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God.

Conclusion

Week after week I want you to be brought back to the book of John. Understanding the testimony that John gives of Jesus so that you will hear with crystal clarity that Jesus is both Lord and God.

You cannot leave this morning without understanding that John recorded Thomas's words so that you might believe them to be true and have eternal life. What should you believe and act upon as you believe in Jesus?

He is to be your Lord. It means your life isn't yours anymore. He is your master and commander. He is to whom you surrender control. This is the most intolerable idea to our individualistic culture, that we want to be in charge of our own life. When you realize that you have mucked it up being in charge means that when you find Jesus who is worthy and able to be your perfect Lord, you will want to surrender your life to him.

He is to be your God. He is worthy of worship. He is your creator and sustainer. He isn't just our Lord but everything about him makes him worthy to be our Lord. He is perfect in every way and his power, love, justice and all his attributes together are glorious beyond compare.

No matter the tragedy you are currently in. No matter the tragedy you may soon be in. That tragedy is no more tragic than sin and death which is overcome by our resurrected Lord and God.

The evidence God provides can lead us out of tragedy and into triumphant eternal life. The evidence that he gave to Thomas he wrote and gives to us so we might have eternal life.

Let us pray to our Lord and God, save us from our tragedy of sin and death and give us triumphant eternal life!