

John 20:24-31 - A life you really don't want to miss

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Date: 20 April 2025

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[0 : 00] I'm reading John 20, verse 24. Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you.

Then he said to Thomas, Put your finger here, see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it to my side. Stop doubting and believe. Thomas said to him, My Lord and my God.

Then Jesus told him, Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those you have not seen and yet have believed. Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. Amen. Thank you, Anderson.

Well, keep that passage open in front of you. I want just for the next few minutes to draw your attention to a few things in that passage. Easter Sunday morning really is the best morning to be in church together because it reminds us all that at the heart of the Christian message is not a kind of idea or a theory.

[1 : 35] Faith is not the center of the Christian message. The church is not the center of the Christian message. No, the empty tomb of Jesus Christ is right at the heart of the Christian message.

This news that Jesus Christ was crucified. He died. He was buried. And yet three days later, physically walked out of the tomb and still today lives in the glories of heaven with a promise to return one day.

So that news is at the heart of the Christian message. Now, let me say to you this morning, especially maybe if you're a guest this morning, you don't normally come to church.

It's brilliant that you're here. We're so glad you've come this morning. Let me say to you, but let me say to all of us, because that news is at the center of the Christian faith, because it's the news of what Christ has done in history that's at the center of the Christian faith, not what you think or you believe or what we do as a church.

It means, doesn't it, that the Christian message is either true because that tomb was empty, or it's false because his body was still there or somewhere else. It can't be anywhere in between that, can it?

[2 : 52] You know, if it's true and Jesus really did rise from the dead and he walked out of that tomb, he ascended into heaven and has a promise one day to return, then there is no news more important than his news.

There's no one more important to listen to than to listen to him this morning. But if he stayed dead, then, well, to be honest, Christians are to be pitied above all people because they hold on to a myth and a lie.

So what I want us to do this morning, and we're only going to do it for a few minutes, I want us just to consider that passage that Anderson read for us, and I want to show you two things from it. The first one is this. I want to show you enough evidence for you to believe.

Enough evidence for you to believe. Look down at verse 30 and 31 for a moment. I'll read them to you again. John writes this. He says, Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

But these are written, he says, that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. I don't know how familiar you are with the Bible's turn of phrase, but John is very direct in his language here, notice.

[4 : 0 6] He tells you that his book is not written to record everything that Jesus did. He's not writing a record of all the events of Jesus' life. No, he's writing for you everything that you need in order to believe in him.

He wants you, notice, look down at the passage, to believe that he is the Messiah. He wants you to believe that Jesus is the promised saviour for the Jewish nation, who they were and still are looking for, and also the Son of God.

That is the divine second person of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now, you have to give John creds, right, because that is a bold claim.

He essentially is telling you right here in this verse that he has given you enough evidence for you this morning to become a Christian. That's what he's saying.

He's saying, listen, I am here, and I know this is not sort of an ordinary thing to do, but he's writing here to persuade you to change your mind and become a Christian. He essentially says that the evidence is enough to persuade all of us this morning to put our faith in Jesus.

[5 : 1 5] Just glance across to chapter 21, verse 25, and you'll notice that he says something similar there. He says, Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

It's just underlining this, isn't he? He's saying, listen, I'm not writing everything. If I wrote everything, you would literally, there would not be a piece of paper left in the world. I'm not writing it all down. Instead, I'm making a case.

And like anybody making a case, John says that he has some signs or some symbols, some signposts to tell you what he's saying, that he is the Messiah, the Son of God, the signposts.

Signposts to the identity of Jesus. Now, that's what John's book has all been about, and we don't have time this morning to go through all of them, but John, in his gospel, gives you seven signs that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God.

Some of them you may have heard of, others of them might be less familiar. So you might have heard of things like the feeding of the 5,000, or Jesus walking on the water. You may not have heard of turning water into wine or healing the man born blind.

[6 : 2 4] But John records seven signs to persuade you that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. And the way it builds is that then it comes to the resurrection as like the final sign, the eighth sign, the greatest, the culmination of everything else.

And John is persuaded that as he tells you of the resurrection, he's giving you enough evidence for you to believe it. I guess the image really is of something like a law court.

You know, imagine in a law court, someone is trying to defend the person in the dock, prove to you that they are innocent. And they bring you witness after witness after witness. And what they do is they save the best to last, don't they?

The last witness, this is really the killer blow, the final straw in the case of the prosecution. This is the thing that's going to prove to you beyond doubt, my client is innocent.

My case is closed. And that's how John records the signs building up to the resurrection. And notice how he proves the resurrection. Look at verse 24. There you'll find Thomas.

[7 : 32] Thomas is a skeptic. He's not yet seen the risen Jesus. And so he is as yet unpersuaded. Look down at verse 25 and see what Thomas says.

He says this, Now I think John writes that because he wonders whether you might be like that this morning.

Thomas is a doubter and a skeptic. Someone who needs concrete proof. And that's what arrives a week later, verse 26. Jesus arrives in the house again.

You'll notice if you look down at it that Jesus comes in through locked doors. Might make you think that Jesus is a ghost. But then he invites Thomas to do what he requested, pressing his hands on his side, proving that he has a real body.

A body that while it might not be bound to time and space in quite the same way as the disciples, it is nonetheless real flesh. Physical resurrection flesh raised from the dead to a new kind of imperishable life.

[8 : 45] And Thomas the skeptic is persuaded, having pressed Jesus' flesh, and he says in verse 28, My Lord and my God.

He says. And then John says that Jesus says something else to him. Notice verse 29. He says, Jesus told him, Because you've seen me, you have believed.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed. See, you might be thinking, well, that's okay for Thomas, isn't it? I would love to be Thomas. I would believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

I would become a Christian right now on the spot if Jesus walked into the room and allowed me to put my hands on his nail marks. If Jesus did that, deal done. I'm a Christian this morning.

And Jesus is anticipating that objection, isn't he? He's saying, no, listen, from this point onwards, belief in the resurrection will be by faith and not by sight. A faith that doesn't see like Thomas, but is built on the sight of a witness like Thomas.

[9 : 47] A faith that is a blessing, says Jesus. Literally a joy or a happiness. Because it's based on the truth and the reality of reliable witnesses. So let me ask you this morning.

What do you think about the resurrection of Jesus? Fact or fiction? If you think it's fact, then it changes everything. I know some of you in this room have been Christians for a very long time.

But really, this is at the bedrock of your Christian faith. At the bedrock of your Christian faith is not you, not your confidence, but is an empty tomb of Jesus Christ.

He died. He rose again. It really happened. Do you believe it? In the years that followed the death and resurrection of Jesus, these eyewitnesses continue to hold out to this truth that they'd met Jesus physically.

Many of these men met violent deaths proclaiming that truth. The body was never produced. No fraud or scandal was ever uncovered. We're told that 500 witnesses saw Jesus all at the same time.

[10 : 53] The news of the resurrection transformed the Roman Empire. It shaped Western civilization. And John says, listen, I've got enough evidence for you to believe it this morning as well. But there's just a little bit more to it than just that.

So I want to show you next what John does next. He wants to show you a life you really don't want to miss. I guess, you see, what I'm trying to get you to see is it all sort of begs the question, doesn't it?

Why is this so important, right? There are lots of events in history that I know very little about, and I'm not even sure whether I've got any confidence in, but it doesn't seem to make a massive difference to my day-to-day life.

So why does it matter that I believe that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God, that I believe that he rose from the dead? But why does that matter? I mean, I don't know about you, but I've got no idea really about the sinking of the Titanic or what happened there other than what I've seen in the movies.

That's probably not true anyway. I know very little about Roman emperors or kings and queens of England. I'll let you in secret. I have not even a GCSE in history, right?

[11 : 57] Many of you in this room are way ahead of me on that school. So what's so special about the resurrection of Jesus that means I should believe this historical claim? Well, look again at John's claim there at the end of verse 31.

He says this. He wants you to believe that by believing, you may have life in his name. That is extraordinary. John suggests that the kind of belief in Jesus that he's trying to persuade us of is sufficient not just to kind of correct our view of historical events, but it is sufficient to give us a whole new kind of life.

Life in his name, as he calls it. Again, John's book has been full of this. You might know the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead. And Jesus says outside the grave of Lazarus, he says to his sisters, he says that he who lives and believes in me will never die.

Now, Jesus prays in John 17 that the disciples might know eternal life, the life of knowing God. Now, I'm going to promise this morning not to preach for too long, so I don't have time to explain all of those things as much as I would really love to.

You can read them for yourself in John's book. If you don't have a Bible, just take home the one that you found on your chair this morning. But let me just short-circuit it for a moment and tell you what all of this means.

[13 : 19] John is saying that the kind of belief that he is talking about brings with it a sharing in the resurrection life of Jesus. Put it another way, to believe in the resurrection of Jesus is to receive resurrection life from Jesus.

Right? If I believe in the resurrection of Jesus in the manner in which John is describing it, I will from Jesus receive his resurrection life for myself. I think this is probably beyond illustration, but I'm going to have a go anyway and it might fail.

Right? I want you just to imagine with me for a moment that it's your birthday. I mean, that might be true. Perhaps it is your birthday this morning. If it is, happy birthday to you. The next bit is mythical. Imagine it's your birthday and I've bought you a car and it's outside in the car park.

I've bought you a Mercedes G-Wagon. It's blacked out. It's been slammed. It's got a radio that will make your ears bleed when you turn it up full blast. Right? It's the dream car.

Right? It's what you've always wanted. And as you step out of the building with me and I say, oh, you know, happy birthday. Here's your brand new G-Wagon car. You literally can't believe it.

[14 : 30] You cannot believe it. Steve, you are known for your stinginess, not your generosity. And you've bought me this. This is incredible. I can't believe how generous you are being to me.

Now, at what point do I know that you've believed me that I bought you that car outside? Well, you walk around it, don't you?

And you kind of admire it. You admire the paintwork. You maybe kind of put your hands on it a bit just to check it's genuinely real and not just some elaborate picture. But I know that you believe me that that's yours when you open the door, get in it, and drive off.

Then I know that you believe me that it's yours. And in a sense, that's what it is here. John is not asking you just to assent to a few facts in history.

John is asking you to believe in Jesus in the way that you would get into that car and drive off in it. He is asking you to invest everything in Jesus, to put your life into his hands.

[15 : 36] You know, plenty of people believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Maybe that's you this morning. You're thinking, Steve, I am already totally persuaded of the resurrection of Jesus. I don't live like a Christian. I don't call myself a Christian.

I don't go to church. But I believe in the resurrection. Well, well done. Lots of people do that. That guy, Wesley Huff, on the internet has persuaded most people that the resurrection actually happened.

Denying the historical resurrection of Jesus is sort of like denying the existence of Henry VIII. It's kind of stupid. It's dumb. But knowing that it happened is not enough because the kind of belief that John is trying to persuade you of is committing yourself fully to Christ.

That's what he's recommending. He wants you to bank everything on Christ wholeheartedly. He wants you to build your life on the truth and foundation of the resurrection of Jesus.

He wants you, if you like, to climb into Jesus by faith and drive off with him and live your life in him and through him and for him. Coming to realize that Christ alone is your hope.

[16 : 42] He is the one alone who can forgive your sin, cleanse your guilt, meet you in your hour of need. Jesus is not just a character of history, but he is God in a body.

He wants you to know that he's your creator. He's your savior. He is my Lord and my God. Just like Thomas said. That's why this is so important.

One of the great things about our church here, and I hope you get this as you sort of just look around you, our church is a brilliant cross-section of the community in which we live. We are from all different kinds of backgrounds. We're different ages.

We're from different places. But we have all come together because we have all found this to be true about Jesus, that he is risen from the dead and living our lives in him and for him is the best way to live.

That's what unites us here this morning. And one of the privileges of being a member of a church like this is that we are amongst senior saints, right?

[17 : 47] There are men and women in this room who have been walking with the Lord Jesus for 60, 70, even 80 years. And we honor them for their faithfulness. We praise God for his keeping power.

And on Easter Sunday, the resurrection, it says this to all of us, but I think it says it especially sweetly to you if you're a senior saint this morning. It says this, listen, the best is still to come.

That's what it says. That through the trials of life, what you have experienced spiritually in the Lord Jesus will be yours physically one day.

You too will receive a resurrection body like his. Death will be swallowed up in victory. What is mortal will be swallowed up by what is immortal. We will put off the tent of this body and put on the house of his new life.

Jesus' resurrection really is like the spring of new eternal life. It is the first fruits of all that is to come. This creation will be remade by Christ in his power and for his glory as he returns, receiving resurrection bodies to live for him, for his praise and glory forever and ever and ever.

[18 : 57] Not in something that is kind of like life, but in life as it was always meant to be. Real life, true life. Life as we all want it. Let me just say as I finish this morning, John writes these words not just to persuade you with the fact of resurrection, but to give you an offer of a share in the resurrection.

A life you don't want to miss. Because John knows, and if you're honest this morning, you too know that no one else can offer you this. There is nothing else like this on offer anywhere else.

No one else in history has an empty tomb. Only Jesus is risen. Everywhere else you look are graves. All the great thinkers, all the great leaders, all the great social campaigners, all the great heroes, all the great footballers.

They're all dead. They're all buried. But Jesus is alive. And he offers life, real life, and invites us to grasp it, not by sight, but by faith.

The hand that reaches out and takes hold of him. So take hold of Jesus this morning. And don't let go. Because the best is still to come for those who trust in him.

[20 : 16] Let me pray, and then we'll sing together. Heavenly Father, we thank you this morning that Jesus is risen and alive.

Thank you that he has conquered death and sin. Thank you that there is great hope in him. We thank you that for those who trust in him, the best is still to come. And we pray that you might help us to live our lives trusting him, honoring him, and bringing him glory.

As we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.