

John 20:24-29

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[0 : 00] Scars. Wounds. Behind every scar there is often a story isn't there? And often it's not a good one. Scars tell us that a person has a past. They speak of a hidden shame. Scars of the heart. Speaking of deep wrongs done by us or to us. So we cover them up. We like smooth skin. We like smooth life. To look and feel squeaky clean.

As we open up John's Gospel near the end here in chapter 20 we're given an account of the first couple of weeks after the death of Jesus Christ.

Where his scars take a prominent place. John includes this passage here where Thomas won't believe until he sees the scars and the wounds.

The message? We don't just see a resurrected man that first Easter Sunday but a scarred resurrected man.

[1 : 17] Because scarred people like you and like me don't just need a living Jesus but a living and wounded Jesus. In this famous appearance of Jesus from the dead he meets Thomas. Doubting Thomas you may have heard of him.

I want to show you three aspects briefly of this meeting today. First of all Thomas' disbelief. Thomas' disbelief.

Jesus says to Thomas in verse 27. Thomas don't disbelieve but believe. Now just for context. This moment, this meeting comes as the second of three appearances of the risen Jesus Christ.

And John tells us that it's eight days after the first one, doesn't he? When Jesus appeared to Mary and some of the other disciples. If you were here last week we heard about that. The only thing is that at the first appearance Thomas wasn't there.

He's one of Jesus' closest followers and yet at this moment he's an outsider. As far as the resurrection of Jesus goes, he's out of the loop.

[2 : 33] He's missed out. He's not seen or felt the risen Jesus Christ. And he says, I'm not going to believe until I do. It's quite strong what he says in verse 25, isn't it?

I will never believe until I do. And maybe you can see yourself in him. And we don't blame him, do we? He's not had the advantage of being there the first time.

And we kind of feel for him. We understand. But the issue with Thomas' disbelief is actually he already has everything he needs to believe.

John tells us, if you look down at verse 25 there, that Thomas now appears with the other disciples. And the other disciples told him, we have seen the Lord.

Just eight days, just a week after the first appearance of the once dead, now living Jesus Christ, Thomas hears the testimony of a body of witnesses.

[3 : 38] Far more than would have been needed in a legal law court testimony. Seeing might be believing, but hearing should be believing here.

The other disciples told him. They told him that they'd seen Jesus Christ come back from the dead. They'd seen him, they'd been with him. People that he knew well, people he's been travelling with and following with Jesus with for months now.

And they are telling him categorically and plainly, seriously Thomas. We have seen him. Those closest to Jesus and those closest to the events themselves.

Those closest to Jesus. Those closest to Jesus. Those closest to Jesus. Those closest to Jesus.

Hearing should be believing. But Thomas disbelieves. If you look down to the end of the passage in John there, Jesus gives us this promise, doesn't he?

In verse 29. Blessed are those who have not seen and believe. And what Jesus shows us there is that what Thomas is asking for is not necessary.

[4 : 50] It is not a lack of evidence that is the issue. It is not the lack of evidence that is the real issue for you. Because Thomas has been told.

He has the disciples' testimony. A testimony of people who have already seen and been with Jesus. And this moment, doesn't it, teaches us that at the heart of disbelief is not a lack of evidence.

But our rejection of the evidence. Our rejection of a message. Of a testimony. And our dismissal of it. Chuck Colson was implicated in the Watergate scandal under Nixon in the 70s.

And he wrote afterwards. I know the resurrection is a fact. And Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified that they'd seen Jesus raised from the dead.

Then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years. Never once denying it. Every one of them was beaten, tortured, stoned, put in prison. And many of them were killed.

[6 : 02] They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world. And they couldn't keep that lie for 12 weeks.

For 3 weeks actually. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep that lie for 40 years? Let me say that if this is the first time you've heard any of this.

Maybe this is the first time you've been to a meeting like this. You're so welcome. We're so glad you're here. And you might be wondering that, well, is there enough evidence for the resurrection? And you can see yourself in Thomas. But you need to realise that you've been told, just as Thomas has been.

You've been told by people who were there. Who actually saw him. You've got their testimony. And you've got to ask, why would they lie? Why would they suffer and die and be persecuted for what they knew to be a lie?

[7 : 09] Why would centuries, millennia's of years of Christians die and be persecuted for what they knew to be a lie? I want to say that if you're looking for evidence of the resurrection, it's not a bad thing to look for.

But actually, all that you need is what you've got in your hands right now. Jesus says, that is enough. You have been told. You've been told by people who were there.

It's more than enough. More than enough to convince you to stop disbelieving and to believe. You don't need to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem or take up a PhD on ancient manuscripts.

You just need to grapple with the message that is before you. To hear them out. And you're blessed if you do, says Jesus. Thomas. Thomas' disbelief.

But secondly, we see Thomas' discovery here, don't we? We see Thomas' discovery. Thomas is pretty well known for his disbelief.

[8 : 12] For his doubting. Doubting Thomas, they call him. And he has enough to believe here. But I want to be more generous to doubting Thomas than we usually are.

Because I think the Gospel writer, John, is. In the end, we see here that Thomas does believe. And the nickname is not fair.

I think John includes his story because there is something unique and climactic about his belief. As well as his doubt.

In the end, Thomas gives the clearest and most explicit statement in the whole of the Gospel of John. Of Jesus' identity.

My Lord and my God. He maybe sees more clearly than anyone else the true identity of Jesus Christ. And he worshipped him.

[9 : 09] So what else was really holding him back? He doesn't accept what he's heard. And that should be enough. But there is something else. Looking more deeply at the passage.

It is because Thomas has not seen the scars. It's a really funny request. If you think about it. I won't believe until I see the wounds.

Until I see the marks of the nails. The scars in his hands. And in his side where he's pierced on the cross. You'd have thought. If I was Thomas. I'd just ask.

I want to see him. I just want him to be in the room. I just want to see him alive. But he's quite specific here, isn't he? It's the one thing that he kind of hones in on.

That the others have had. That he requests. I want to see his scars. Jesus appears in this miraculous way.

[10 : 13] It's really odd, isn't it? As we read about it. John tells us the room was locked. And Jesus comes and he stands in the room and says, Peace be with you.

We can't explain that. He was dead and now he's alive again. And he has a real body and yet it's been changed, hasn't it?

He can walk through walls. He's not held by the old restrictions and the weaknesses of a human body. He's got a glorified human body. And so why, if he's got this perfect body, is it still punctured with wounds?

You'd have thought the scars would have been wiped away, wouldn't you? In the resurrection. Cleaned up. Removed. But perhaps Thomas knows.

He knows that he doesn't just need a living Lord Jesus, who is squeaky clean. He needs a living and wounded Lord Jesus.

[11:15] And Jesus shows them all his scars. And we wonder, does this drive to the heart of Thomas' request? That somehow he knows that a living Jesus without scars is not worth believing in.

John is the only gospel writer who tells us that Jesus was pierced in his side. He gives us that detail. He gives us other details about nails hammered into his wrists and feet.

A week before Jesus appears to Thomas, John tells us in a passage earlier that Jesus appears from the dead to his disciples in a similar situation behind locked doors.

And what's the first thing he does? He shows them his wounds and his scars. It is as if Jesus is saying, isn't there, there will be no point in me living for you and rising from the dead for you on Easter Sunday if I have not been wounded and scarred and died for you on Good Friday.

My resurrection life means something to you because of my Easter Friday death for you.

[12:37] Every scar tells a story. The young boy, Estor Taylor, had been given a new pair of roller skates. It took a while to learn to use them but eventually he ventured out.

But in his clumsiness, Estor Taylor lost balance and skidded towards a stove in the kitchen. At that moment his father dived in between Taylor and the stove but the momentum pushed his father against the oven severely burning him when he pulled away.

Sorry, it's graphic but some skin was left behind. Taylor Senior was scarred for life. Some scars speak of shame, don't they?

Scars we have. But that kind of scarring speaks of sacrificial love. And the scars on Jesus' body speak of his suffering for the sake of his people.

He is scarred for life. For your life and for my life. To take the scars that are due in this world of wrongs done by us and wrongs done to us.

[13:59] And we see the ugliness of that wrong, don't we? As we look at the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. The wrong in our lives.

We see that with the scars inflicted upon Jesus in a brutal, shameful, wrathful death in an unimaginable physical and spiritual moment of suffering.

Speaks of what we deserve. Peter says in that passage on your sheets that Christ suffered once for sins the righteous for the unrighteous.

Scars that speak to us of his sacrifice of love. Scarred for life. And perhaps Thomas knew that without those scars our wounds will never heal.

and we can never be forgiven. We can never be clean in God's sight. Wrongs can never be put right. And the peace that Jesus offers in this room cannot arrive without seeing the scars of the end of the war.

[15:17] The disbelief, the discovery, and thirdly and lastly the demand. The demand. Thomas makes a demand here doesn't he?

I've got to see the scars. And Christ graciously answers and he makes that prayer a reality.

He shows him the scars but then he makes a demand of Thomas too doesn't he? In return. Stop disbelieving and believe.

And I think we need to pay attention to both. We need in a way to make the same demand that Thomas does. To never accept a cross less Christ.

To never accept a cross less Christianity. And if there are no wounds on your Christ and no wounds in your Christianity it is not the real thing.

[16:18] The legend goes of St. Teresa of Avila who one day saw a vision of the devil who appeared to her in the form of Christ.

But Teresa wasn't fooled for a second. She immediately dismissed him and before leaving the devil asked her how did you know? How did you know I wasn't the Christ? Her answer no wounds.

The appearance of Jesus to Thomas gives us something unique doesn't it? It teaches us to look for healing only in the one with wounds.

To recognise healing and forgiveness in him alone. We do not accept a Christ who promises health and wealth in this life.

And if you've been told about him then be a doubting Thomas. We like Thomas don't need a God who has coasted through this life with ease and who promises us the same.

[17 : 20] We don't need a God who's never suffered. We need a living God a God who is involved a wounded God. We need a God who's truly suffered and exhausted all of the hurt and all of the wrong and all of the scars that we deserve and we receive so that true healing might come for body and for soul.

We don't need a God who is merely tattooed with suffering. I was reading an article by a guy called Brett McKay this week who writes a blog for men really modern men and he talks about our interest in tattoos.

It's really interesting. Sorry if you've got a tattoo guys today. This isn't me getting at you but he says that modern men love tattoos because in our culture we've never crawled under barbed wire but we've got it wrapped around our bicep.

We've never seen a tiger but we've got one on our back. We're not part of any tribe but we've got tribal symbols on our chest. For the modern man without battles and dangerous adventures to mark our skin with wounds showing where we've been and what we've done we paint on symbols of what we'd like to have done and how we'd like to see ourselves.

While scars used to identify us to others we now use tattoos to identify ourselves to ourselves. But Jesus is not merely a scarred man merely a tattooed man is he?

[19 : 04] Jesus is no pretender he is no poser he is no smooth skinned tattooed god this is no stolen valour he's the real deal and his scars speak of real real sacrifice and maybe you're like Thomas in this way that you'll never trust a man who's never suffered and you'll never trust the god whose feet have never touched the ground of this earth and you shouldn't you shouldn't but the living and wounded lord is here and so he makes a demand of us in return stop believing stop disbelieving and believe to come to the wounded saviour whose scars speak to you of his love scarred for life he's scarred for your new life for true healing for forgiveness wrongs put right between you and god and of cleansing so come to the wounded one come to the living and wounded lord jesus christ this easter let's pray together you