

John 20:19-31

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[0 : 00] Good afternoon, it's good to see you all. Do keep that sheet of paper open as we'll be looking at this passage together. Well, many of you will be familiar with the hymn Amazing Grace, probably one of the most famous hymns there are.

It's written by a man called John Newton, who wrote lots of other hymns. One of his other famous hymns opened like this. What think ye of Christ is the test to try both your state and your scheme. You cannot be right in the rest unless you think rightly of him. What think ye of Christ? You cannot be right in the rest unless you think rightly of him.

That language might sound quite old-fashioned, but those words are still absolutely true. What you think about Jesus is absolutely crucial.

It is the most important question you will ever be asked. It's so crucial, in fact, that the Bible gives us four different accounts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

[1 : 11] They're not four competing accounts, so you can pick one of four options. They are four accounts that work together to give us the most robust picture possible of who Jesus is.

You could just read one of them, and one of them would be enough to tell you who Jesus is, if you've only ever read one of them. You have read enough to know who Jesus is, but together they do bring together all kinds of different colours to show us who Jesus is.

And around the ages, the church has seen that there are three key questions, really, to get sorted, who Jesus is.

If you want to think who Jesus is, if you want to think rightly about Christ, here are the three questions. First, who is he? Second, what is his work? And three, how is the work done?

Who is he? What is the work? And how is the work done? Those are the three questions that the church has acknowledged from the Bible. These are what we need to get straight, to think rightly about Christ. If you get any one of those questions wrong, you end up in deep waters.

[2 : 18] You can answer the third question just from looking at the overall shape of each of the four Gospels. How is the work done? Each of the four Gospels show you that the work is done first down, and then up.

Down to the cross, to death, and to the grave. And up from the grave, beyond death, and up to heaven. Every Gospel account has that shape.

Some of the events that you might see in the same Gospels, they might not necessarily be all in the same order. They might be ordered in a particular way to show a particular point. But the overall shape is always down and then up.

That's how the work is done. Going down and then going up. And the first three Gospels that we've looked at in this series, they're commonly called the Synoptic Gospels.

They are focused on question two. What is his work? That's a particular accent or particular colour that we've got from each of those three. So we saw from Matthew, that he is the King for whose sake we all exist, before anyone or anything else.

[3 : 30] We saw from Mark, that he is the prophet, to whom we should listen above all other voices. And we saw from Luke, that he is the priest who alone can reunite us to God, to give forgiveness to sinners, and to give God's blessing to them.

This is what theologians have called the three offices of Christ, or the threefold office of Christ. But it's basically one of the three jobs that he has done, to help his people and to save his people.

That's the work that Christ has done. And then this fourth Gospel, it focuses particularly on that first question, who is he? And we see this particular colour of John's Gospel, the same way I pointed out the colours of the other Gospels, by looking especially at the beginning, and the end of each book.

So if you're familiar at all, with the beginning of John's Gospel, and that famous prologue, we learn there that he is the Word, the Word who was with God, who was God in the beginning, and the Word was made flesh.

We learn, in language that was developed later, he is the second person of the Trinity. He is God the Son, a divine person who acquired a human nature. And so the particular resurrection colour that we get in John, is that Jesus is the risen God-man.

[4 : 53] Jesus is the risen God-man. And John actually makes that teaching point explicit, in verse 31 of our passage today.

He says that his goal, is for you to come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, that is the human Messiah, or anointed one, and the Son of God.

You might say, well it only says Son of God. It doesn't say God. And Son of God is sometimes used as a sort of a kingly title, and it's given to other humans as well.

And you'd be right in that. It is sometimes used for other people. But in John's writing, John makes it very clear, that when he uses Son language, he is really thinking about God the Son.

So in John 5, for example, when everyone, including those who hated Jesus, heard Jesus speaking about God being his own Father, they understood that when he said that God was his own Father, he was making himself equal with God.

[5 : 59] That's what everyone understood, that to call God his own Father for Jesus, was to make himself equal with God. That is how the Son language is used in John. So for John to say, I want you to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, is the same as to say, I want you to believe that Jesus is God.

So at the end of this lengthy and beautifully written book, he wants to ask you and me, do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the man who was appointed to be king and prophet and priest and anointed to those positions, and do you also believe that he is the Son of God?

Do you see that he is both Christ and Son of God, and that he is the only available source of eternal life? And if not, right at the end of this book, so there's one more chapter after this chapter, well, he gives us the privilege of getting a glimpse into one man's journey of faith, to coming to believe this point as we follow Thomas.

And there are three things that John shows us about Thomas. First he tells us the story that Thomas heard, then we see the significance that Thomas understood, and then the sight that proved it true.

So first, the story that Thomas heard. If you look at verses 19 to 23, we see that the risen Jesus appears to his disciples on a Sunday evening.

[7 : 33] There's your reason never to skip the Sunday evening service at church, wherever you attempted. I'm kidding, mostly. And Jesus gives them his peace.

He blesses them, gives them peace, and he proves to them not only his identity, but his lordship, as he shows them his wounds. He proves that he's conquered death, it's the same Jesus, it's the very one who went to the cross.

And in verse 20, they're not just glad when they saw him, but glad when they saw the Lord. They realise this is the Lord, who has risen. And he gives them a divine commission, in verse 23, and in verse 21.

Verse 21, As the Father has sent me, so also I am sending you. He is giving them God's commission, and then what that commission is in verse 23, we'll come to you in a minute, but between giving them the commission, and the meaning of the commission, verse 22, he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit.

Note that he doesn't pray, or ask for the Spirit to be given to them. He himself breathes the Spirit on them. He himself gives the Spirit to them, with this symbolic breathing out, from his own body.

[8 : 58] The life-giving Holy Spirit of God, is the Spirit of Jesus. And then he delegates them, to do what only God could ever do.

Certainly what only God could delegate anyone to do. Verse 23, He gives them the authority, to grant God's forgiveness. He himself gives them this ministry, to go and preach forgiveness, and to declare forgiveness.

That's the story that Thomas heard. It would be quite a lot to take in, wouldn't it? Especially, when you're so raw, from the trauma, of losing your master.

Maybe he was just too hurt, to hear it. Maybe he suspected, his friends were just trying to come up, with some kind of, crazy, useless, coping strategy, to deal with the grief.

But for him, he was probably thinking, that he's just had, the biggest, most painful, disappointment, of his life. And he's saying, now you want me, to devote my life, to pretend that everything's fine, that he's actually alive again, and that you want me, to go around preaching forgiveness, pretending that Jesus is alive again, when I'm still this hurt.

[10:12] And when I know that, I know he's dead. You want me to go to the world, and the society, that executed Jesus, and preach forgiveness. Absolutely no way.

Verse 25, he makes it very clear, he needs to see him. He wants proof. He's not going to give his life, to this mission, when he knows it's that hopeless, and pointless, just as a coping strategy, for grief.

It's what many people will say, when they hear, well, maybe the disciples made it up, as a coping strategy. Well, Thomas has thought of that possibility, and he's thinking, no way am I doing that. I'm not going to go around, preaching this, as a coping strategy.

Now, of course, he should have known, from what Jesus had predicted before, but so should the other disciples. They should have known as well. I think we can, sometimes be quite hard on Thomas, for not believing, when actually the disciples, were just as foolish, for not believing, before they saw Jesus.

And so, he hears the story, and he won't believe, but a week goes by, the next time we see him, verse 26, eight days later, so we don't see him again, until the next Sunday.

[11:25] And so, we need to think about, the significance, that Thomas understood, from the story. Over that week, I'm sure that story, that he heard from his disciples, must have rattled around, and rattled around, constantly.

I'm not sure, he would have got much sleep. He had seen Jesus, bring people to life, before. But, there was nobody around now, to do that for Jesus.

For him to come back, would mean, conquering death, himself. And who could do that, but God. His friends had said, that they should bring forgiveness, to the world, and only God, can give that kind of mission.

It's terribly presumptuous, to think that we can just go out, and give forgiveness, if it's just made up. You might have wondered, where were the disciples, getting this idea, that we have the right, to go and do that?

How can we go out, and fool people like that? Only God can give, and achieve, and earn forgiveness, for anyone, let alone so many people, around the world. He'd heard about, how Jesus had breathed, the spirit on them, or breathed, the breath of God, on them.

[12:38] Spirit and breath, is the same word. Well surely, only God, can breathe the breath of God, on people. So what are they doing, with this story, about Jesus, being alive, and breathing, the breath of God, on them?

If this story, was true, and it seemed like, it was probably, just a made up, coping strategy, if it was true, it would have to mean, that Jesus was more than, just a teacher, and a master, it must mean, that he is God himself.

Which must be, a scandalous conclusion, for any devout Jew, to make. How could God, also be a man? How could we call, any man, my God?

So he concludes, it must be, a ridiculous lie, and he might have thought, well, maybe they don't realize, just how much, they're claiming here. Maybe they don't realize, that they're claiming, that Jesus must be God.

If he is alive, if he is giving, the spirit of God, upon people, if he is commissioning people, to preach God's forgiveness, then, it's not just that he's alive, but you're saying, he's God.

[13:46] I don't know about you, and we don't really know, what Thomas was thinking, in details, during that week, but I reckon, I would have dug my heels in, if I'd realized, those conclusions, I thought, well, actually, the more I think about it, the more I must resist.

If you're going to make, all these claims, there's no way, I can believe, not just that he's alive, but also, all these massive consequences, of the story, they're telling him. But then, thirdly, came the sight, that proved it true.

The sight, that proved it true. As in verse 28, that we see, that that is, truly what Thomas, had concluded, from the story, because that is, precisely how he responds, when he does see Jesus, he

would have figured out, I would need to see this, for myself, to come close, to believing it, and as soon as, he does see him, when Jesus comes in, and says, put your finger here, see my hands, put out your hand, and place it in my side, do not disbelieve, but believe.

Thomas answered him, my Lord, and my God. Some people, have tried to, argue this away, as though, maybe he was just, you know, a statement of shock, my Lord and my God, as though, he was sort of, blaspheming.

There is absolutely, no way, John would be, advocating blasphemy, as an appropriate response, to seeing Jesus, resurrected. He is speaking, to Jesus, and see that word, answered, Thomas, answered him, he is directing this, to Jesus, and very simply saying, my Lord, and my God.

[15 : 27] Thomas is stating, unequivocally, Jesus is, his Lord, and his Master, but more than that, he is God himself. A radical statement, for him, he would have realised that, but it was the only, possible conclusion, for him.

You are God. Nobody corrects him, nobody tells him, how dare you say, that, nobody picks up, stones to stone him, which, if it weren't true, might have been appropriate, but no, he accepts it, everyone else accepts it, and Jesus acknowledges there, that what he has done, is to believe, have you believed, because you have seen me, or it might just be, you have believed, because you have seen me, and then he says, blessed are those, who have not seen, and yet have believed, he has this commission now, to go and, bring blessing to others, who haven't seen, and who won't see, and yet there is this invitation, for anyone who has not seen, to also be blessed, along with Thomas, to know that Jesus, is Lord, and God, and so that's how, John concludes, Jesus did many other signs, in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written, so that you may believe, that Jesus is the Christ, if you don't believe, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, this book was for you, it was written for you, to come to believe, that Jesus is the Christ, and that as you believe, that you might have life, in his name,

I think it's an amazing moment, of clever irony, in this book, because what is the one thing, that proves to this doubter, that Jesus is God, it's seeing a man, it's seeing his body, seeing his wounds, it's this great climax, of the book, where John has been emphasising, that this man Jesus, he is God, and man, in one person, what would you expect, to be the proof, that someone is God, here is seeing his body, precisely, precisely as he sees, the man Jesus, Thomas knows, that Jesus is God, just as John, has said, at the beginning of the book, no one has seen God, but Jesus, has made him known, Jesus has revealed him, he's not just alive, but Jesus is the giver, of life, and John is calling us all, who haven't seen this, to be blessed, alongside Thomas, alongside all those, who saw, by simply believing, and having faith, that's all, that's all he's asking you to do, believe, and as you believe, in Jesus, you will have life, in his name, so I've asked you, questions along this series, and who are you living for, if not for Jesus, the king, who are you listening to, if not Jesus the prophet, who will bless you, if not Jesus the priest, but crucially, where will you get, eternal life, if not Jesus Christ, if you don't realise, that Jesus, is the only source, of eternal life, there is no life for you, there is no forgiveness, for you, there is no friendship, with God for you, but John Newton said, you cannot be right, in the rest, unless you think, rightly of him, to get the identity, of Jesus wrong, is to get, everything else wrong, but if you see, and believe, that Jesus, this resurrected man, is both Christ, and son of God,

God himself, and you put your trust, in him, believe in him, you can have, eternal life, in him, let's pray, Thank you.