

John 20:24-31

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[0 : 00] Well, if you've ever bought anything from the internet, or updated your computer software as I was doing the other day, you will have seen these but probably ignored them.

If you have ever signed a contract for anything, you will have been shown these, and you may have glanced at them at your bank or wherever, but generally just signed your name and ignored them. If you've entered into any competition from the back of a cereal packet or wherever, you may have glanced at these, but most probably you ignored them. What are they?

They are the terms and conditions. I don't know about you, but I tend to tick that box on my computer without even thinking, yeah, just download the software, Mr. Apple, I need it, just get it down here, get on with it.

I just assume I'm going to agree with them. Do you, or are you a bit more picky? And let me ask you this question, who gets to set the terms and conditions? Who gets to set the terms and conditions?

[1 : 01] When I updated my wife's iPad software, it was Apple who set the terms and conditions. When I just now went to get some photos printed at Boots, Boots set the terms and conditions.

If you go to your bank, you don't like the terms and conditions, they're not going to change them. They'll say, okay, go find another bank. So the one in the position of power, the one who is the service provider, if you like, is the one who is able to set the terms and conditions.

And yet, and yet, I think most of us probably have, if not written down, at least mentally in our minds, a series of what we could call terms and conditions by which we expect other people will interact with us.

So, I will lend my neighbour my car, providing he doesn't keep parking his car in the wrong place, providing he doesn't complain about my garden being too messy.

I will help my colleague at work, providing they leave me in peace the rest of the time, or providing they're being good to me as well.

[2 : 09] I will give money to that charity person, providing they promise they will never contact me again. So we all have these little terms and conditions, don't we?

And as we read John chapter 20, we see Thomas had some terms and conditions. But actually, so does the Lord Jesus. And the question for us is, do we have terms and conditions?

But even before we jump into the passage, well, let's look at terms and conditions, verse 24. Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, we've seen the Lord.

But he said to them, unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will never believe.

That's Thomas' terms and conditions. But before we actually look at those in more detail, I want us to notice one thing just in passing. Why is it Thomas had missed out on meeting the risen Lord Jesus?

[3 : 12] How had he missed this? Earlier in the chapter, we read about Mary running to the tomb that first Easter morning to look for him. We read about Peter and John running to the tomb to look for Jesus. We then read about Jesus meeting with all the other disciples that evening.

But Thomas wasn't there. Thomas wasn't there. We don't know why Thomas wasn't there. Maybe he had some other pressing things to do that night, which kept him from being with God's people. Maybe that was part of his terms and conditions. And this Jesus seems to have died, I'm going to go away somewhere else and go on my business. We don't know. But he missed out because he was not with the rest of the Lord's people on what became the Lord's day, the first day of the week. Now that's not the main point of this passage, but I want to throw it in because I think John doesn't put this detail in accidentally. If we are not with the Lord's people, we will miss out.

If we are not with the Lord's people, we will miss out. That was true of Thomas. It can be true of us. People often say, I'm struggling with my faith. I think one man who came to me once saying, I'm really struggling with these doubts.

[4 : 22] And as we got into the conversation, I realised why. Yes, it was partly colleagues at work who believed different things. But it was mainly, he was not regularly at church. He was not regularly with the Lord's people.

So that was Thomas' problem, if you like. But look at Thomas' terms and conditions. Well, do you see his attitude? It might sound, to some people it might sound reasonable. I want to see proof. I want to see evidence that Jesus has really been raised from the dead. But actually, is it really reasonable of Thomas? Is it really reasonable? Who sets the terms and conditions?

The service provider, the one in power. Apple, or Microsoft, or your bank, or whoever it is. So what's Thomas doing setting terms and conditions? He's saying, actually, Jesus needs to serve me. Jesus needs to fit in with my agenda. Jesus needs to do what I want. I have a neighbour of mine, a couple of doors down, who I was reading the Bible with for a while. And this guy, Paul, had this, to me, very odd idea of God.

[5 : 29] He kept on talking about God needing to prove himself. He kept on talking as if God was a politician trying to secure your vote. Or if God is a salesman, he's got a sales target, and is desperate for believers, desperate for people to buy in, so that he can reach his end-of-month target.

It's like he pictured God as being like Zach Goldsmith or Sadiq Khan, trying desperately to win our votes for the mayoral election. And at this point, I should refer you to the website, so you can see all the other candidates whose names I haven't mentioned, in the interest of neutrality.

But God is not like that. And earlier on in this Gospel, Jesus has criticised that kind of idea. So John chapter 4, verse 48, speaking to an official in Capernaum, Jesus said to him, Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.

In other words, you want me to perform, you want me to meet your terms and conditions. I wonder how many times, even those who profess to be Christians, actually set terms and conditions for God.

I'm sure we don't write them down, I'm sure we don't even necessarily consciously think about it. But perhaps in our own hearts, we think, well, okay, I will get more committed to a local church when it's easier, when the kids are older.

[6 : 45] Or I'll get more committed to serving in the church when work isn't quite so frantic. Or I'll give more money when I've got enough myself, when I get a pay rise.

And if you're working in the public sector, that's probably about 20 years' time. Sadly. You see, we can set these terms and conditions for God, can't we? And people who are not believers do it as well.

So Bertrand Russell, the very famous British historian and philosopher, was asked once what he would say if he found himself standing before God on judgment day. And God said, why didn't you believe in me?

Russell replied, I would say, not enough evidence, God. Not enough evidence. And in fact, John says earlier on in this gospel, the reason people don't come to the light, the reason people don't believe, is not because of lack of evidence.

It's because they prefer the darkness. They prefer to live lives their own way. There's no intellectual reason not to believe in God. There are only moral reasons. But you see the problem here, the problem for Thomas, the problem for Bertrand Russell, the problem for many of us possibly, is trying to assert terms and conditions on God.

[8 : 01] Well, that's Thomas' problem. Let's look, as the story unfolds, at Jesus' powerful presence. Verse 26, eight days later, the doors are locked. Presumably the disciples are still afraid of the Jews.

This time Thomas is there. Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you. So we're back on a Sunday again, the way the Jews count days. Sunday, the Lord's Day.

Thomas this time is with the Lord's people. And even locked doors cannot keep the physical body of the Lord Jesus away. There are no barriers he cannot cross.

And Jesus, he knows exactly what Thomas had said. He knows exactly what Thomas' terms and conditions are. Look at verse 27. Jesus said to Thomas, put your finger in here.

See my hands. Put out your hand and place it in my side. Thomas, I know what you said in private. I know what your terms and conditions are. Well, try me.

[8 : 59] See if I meet them. I don't know if you've ever had that feeling, that experience, of somebody, you saying something about somebody, that you suddenly realise they've heard you say it. I had this terrible moment at school once where I'd just been letting off to friends around the lunch table about my terrible teacher and how all the work he was forcing me to do.

At which point I heard, felt a hand rest on my shoulder. I said, Stuart, you don't know, you always call me Cashman. So he's very poised.

He says, Stuart, you don't have to do that. It's your choice. It's there to help you. I felt about this small. How do you think Thomas feels at this point?

As he stands in front of the man he thought was dead and Jesus says, come on, put your fingers here. Put your hand in this wound. It's actually humbling, isn't it?

But I wonder if you notice something else about Jesus' powerful presence. He does not come to lecture Thomas. He does not say, Thomas, you've had your chance. You were with me for three years.

[10 : 04] I explained everything to you. These guys have told you I'm alive and you didn't believe tough luck, game over. He doesn't say that, does he? Rather, he is gracious and still comes and says, peace be with you, even you who doubt it.

Thomas, you didn't believe? Come on, believe. Have this peace that only I can offer. And you see what the effect of Jesus' presence on Thomas is?

Verse 28. Thomas answered him, my Lord and my God. See the change there from being pretty grumpy, from being pessimistic.

If you read through the rest of John's Gospel, Thomas isn't just a doubter. In chapter 11, as Jesus is going to Jerusalem, Thomas says, okay, let's go, we'll go with him and die. Cheery bloke, Thomas, isn't he? Chapter 14, when Jesus says, you know where I'm going, Thomas says, no, I don't know where you're going, what's going on?

Kind of grumpy, pessimistic, possibly scared man. Yet now he falls at the feet of the Lord Jesus. Humbled, confronted by the truth, and above all, liberated.

[11 : 12] Peace be with you, my Lord and my God. See here, Thomas finally confesses what John has been making clear all through this account of Jesus' life. Jesus is 100% God.

He is fully divine. He's not so 50% God and 50% man. He's not some creation of gods. He is 100% God. Right at the start, chapter 1, verse 1, John had nailed that.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God and the Word is with God. This Jesus is God. And Thomas now sees this for himself.

Death could not hold it. And do you notice Jesus' response to Thomas at this point. He doesn't say, no, get off your feet, man, I'm just a man like you. Every other time in the Bible where someone bows down to worship as God, either a human being, Acts 14, or an angel, Revelation 1, the human or the angel says, no, no, don't worship me, I'm just a creature.

Worship the Creator. Jesus does not do that. He is Lord. He is God. So he accepts that from Thomas as the right response to the risen Christ.

[12 : 33] But also when you see this is personal. My Lord, Thomas says, my Lord, I was setting the terms and conditions. I was saying you have to do this for me.

Now I surrender. You are God. You are my Lord. You set the terms and conditions of my life. I will not do it any longer. I wonder, can you say that?

Can you say that Jesus is your Lord and your God? The one who you'll surrender to. No matter what comes.

No matter what life throws at you. Whatever the distresses and sadnesses. Would you trust the Saviour who has been to the cross who will forever bear the marks of that suffering.

Will you trust him as the Lord and God? Thomas did. Faced with that reality. And Jesus gave him mercy. C.S. Lewis, many of you will know the author of the Narnia Chronicles and a great scholar at Oxford and eventually a professor at Cambridge, wrote about his own experience of reaching the conclusion that Jesus is Lord and God.

[13 : 46] He writes this, you can picture me alone in that room in Magdalene College night after night feeling whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work the steady unrelenting approach of him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet.

That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity term, that's the summer term of 1929, I gave in and admitted that God was God and knelt and prayed perhaps that night the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.

I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing the divine humility which will accept a convert on such terms. We see that humility in Jesus, don't we?

Accepting Thomas in some senses on his terms. And in his grace he will break through some of our resistance to bring that peace he promised.

But look at the promise Jesus makes here as well, verse 29. Because you and I are not like Thomas, we haven't seen Jesus. What's the promise? Verse 29. Jesus said to him, if you believe because you see me, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

[15:04] If you're a Christian here today, you are blessed, you're approved by God, you're delighted in by God, you are loved because you've believed in his son. You are objectively in God's family, objectively on God's side, blessed because you have believed without seeing.

We see Thomas' problem. We see Jesus' powerful presence. Finally, let's look at John's purpose, verses 30 and 31. Now Jesus did many other signs of the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book.

But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. Hear what John's saying?

I could have written lots and lots and lots more. In fact, you're in my office, you see the piles of notes I'd taken of the stuff that wasn't going to make the final cut. But this is in the final cut and it's here for a reason.

I'm writing with an agenda and I'm actually absolutely clear about it. My agenda is that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. So for that reason, Mark, John has recorded seven signs, signs, miracles which are signposts to Jesus' true identity.

[16:21] Turning water into wine in Canaan, raising the official son in chapter 4, healing the lame man by the pool in chapter 5, feeding the 5,000 in chapter 6, walking on the water in chapter 6, healing the man born blind in chapter 9, raising Lazarus in chapter 11.

All these are written so we can see who Jesus truly is. They're all signs that he is the Christ, that is God's long-promised king, the one who God promised to come and put the world right again and establish his right rule over a world that was in rebellion and following the devil's ways.

But not only is he God's promised king, he is the Son of God, the one who came from the Father, the one who fully reveals God to us, the one who shows us what God is like, there's nothing un-Christ-like about God.

Jesus shows us fully. Not only was he with the Father in the beginning, not only did he come from the Father, but with the Father he sends the Spirit as well. He says, the God of the Bible is a trinity, three persons in one.

That is why Jesus can be God and the Son of God. God is three in one, Father, Son and Spirit. This is the God of the Bible, this is the God John wants us to believe in. And do you see what the terms and conditions are here?

[17:41] If you believe, if you submit to Jesus as God's forever king, what do we get? Life in his name.

Real life. What is life actually about? Some people think it's about experiences, don't they? Some people travel the world searching for something. I think of my wife's cousin, she's constantly travelling everywhere.

like she's in search of something. Some people think life is all about having possessions, having the right lifestyle, having the right education.

Jesus says life is worth much more than that. Life, as we look through John's Gospel, life is about forgiveness of sins rather than condemnation, about being loved by the living God, the God who made us.

Life is about having light instead of darkness. The light of knowing the truth that comes from God instead of the darkness of stumbling around with our own ideas, with our own morality and where it leads to.

[18:47] Ultimately, life, Jesus says, John chapter 17, verse 3, this is eternal life, the Emmanuel God and Jesus Christ whom he sent. This is what we are wired for, this is what we are created for.

This is life. And there is only one way to get it. There is only one way to get it. That is by believing in his name, believing in this Jesus who came to die.

And you see, he is the provider, isn't he? He is the one who provides life. So he can set the terms and conditions. He can say, you must tick this box, believe in me, submit to me as your Lord and your God as Thomas has done.

That is the way to have life. It is not good enough to believe generally there is a God out there. That is insufficient. James later on in the New Testament tells us even the demons believe that and shudder.

It is not enough to believe that Jesus was just a prophet sent from God. Islam teaches that. It is not enough to believe that Jesus was just a manifestation of God. Many Hindus or Sikhs will take that idea.

[19 : 56] it is not enough to believe that Jesus was just the Son of God but not actually God. Because that is not his name. That is not what John is telling us we need to believe in.

Rather we must fall down with Thomas and say, my Lord and my God. You see, to cite what Burkham and Russell said, there is plenty of evidence.

It is not lack of evidence that keeps anyone away. so that we prefer the darkness to the light. We want to trust in ourselves or something else and not in the Jesus who has stepped into history to reveal God to us and to rescue us for God.

So the question as we close really is do we trust? Do we believe in his name? Or do we still have terms and conditions that we want Jesus to meet? May we pray for us.