

The One Who Conquered Death

John 19:30–20:31

Part 6

I hope that you had a great thanksgiving! Lynn and I certainly did. Unfortunately, as I had the opportunity to visit with my various family members I was once again reminded of the many hardships that we as people are continually confronted with.

Life is not easy. Christ never told us it would be. But Christ did provide for us hope. Christ told His disciples in **John 14:19**, “**After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; and because I live, you shall live also.**” This is a glorious hope. It is the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel that helps to sustain us in our work of disciple making in the midst of all the ups and downs of life.

This promise that Christ gave His disciples in **John 14:19** of one day living in the blessed presence of Christ forever is based on Christ’s total and complete mastery over death.

And it is this total and complete mastery over death that the Apostle John details for us in **John 19:30–20:31**. And in how many different ways does the Apostle John do this?

The Apostle John manifests Christ’s complete and total mastery over death in three different ways in John 19:30–20:31.

First of all, Christ’s mastery over death was manifested in His dying (John 19:30-37). We saw this in **John 19:30-37**.

Secondly, Christ’s mastery over death was manifested in His burial (John 19:38-42). We saw this in **John 19:38-42**.

And thirdly, we have begun to see how Christ’s mastery over death was manifested in His resurrection (John 20:1-31).

So did Christ actually rise from the dead? This is what the Apostle John believed and he gives us a very clear glimpse into why he believed this in **John 20:1-31**.

The Apostle John in **John 20:1-31** presents two different exhibits to support the fact of the resurrection. And what was the first exhibit?

The first exhibit that John presented to support the resurrection was the empty tomb (John 20:1-10). And what was the second exhibit?

The second exhibit was eyewitness accounts (John 20:11-31). This is the exhibit that we are now examining. And what was the first eyewitness account that John recorded for us and that we considered two weeks ago?

The first eyewitness account was Mary Magdalene's (John 20:11-18). And where did we find this account? We found it in **John 20:11-18**.

And what was the second eyewitness account that we considered last week? The second eyewitness account was Christ's disciples with Thomas absent (John 20:19-23). And where did we find this account? We found it in **John 20:19-23**.

We are now ready to consider the third eyewitness account that John records for us in **John 20:1-31**. And what was this third account?

The third eyewitness account was Christ's disciples with Thomas present (John 20:24-31). So what is my hope for this message this morning?

My hope for this message, as we examine this third eyewitness account, is that we might not only be reminded of the overwhelming amount of evidence that we have to support the fact of Christ's resurrection, and thus the overwhelming amount of support that we have to believe in His promise that even if we die we will live again in the blessedness of His presence, but also that the one who loved us and gave Himself for was in fact God Himself.

So now let us now turn our attention to the verses that we will be considering this morning. And what is that very first verse? It is **verse 24**. So

let me read this verse for you. **“But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.”**

So what do we learn from this verse? When Jesus appeared to His disciples for the very first time after His resurrection Thomas was not with them (John 20:24).

So, what do we know about this particular disciple? Thomas was a pessimist (John 11:16). When Jesus told His disciples of His intent to go to Bethany near the end of His public ministry in order to raise Lazarus from the dead Christ’s disciples were very concerned for His safety, and more specifically one particular disciple. And who was that? Thomas! So how did Thomas respond when Christ made His intent known that we was going to Bethany in **John 11:16**? This is how he responded. He spoke up and said to his fellow disciples, **“Let us also go, so that we may die with Him.”** Clearly Thomas was a pessimist but we certainly cannot question his loyalty. Thomas preferred to die with Christ than to be left behind while Christ went on to Bethany without Him.

Perhaps it was Thomas’ pessimistic or perhaps even his melancholic personality that might explain why he may have not been with the disciples when Christ first appeared to them in **John 20:19-23**. In other words, perhaps he was so upset in light of all that had happened and was happening that he was in no mood to socialize.

So, what does John tell us the disciples did after Christ had revealed Himself to them and had showed Himself alive?

According to John 20:25, the disciples, after Jesus had revealed Himself to them and had convinced them that He had risen from the dead, then communicated this good news to Thomas. Hallelujah! Now Thomas could share their joy!

This is what we might have expected. But this certainly is not what happened. Let us continue to read **John 20:25**

Let us continue to read **John 20:25** and what does it say? **“But he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my**

finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

The response of Thomas to the report of his fellow disciples that they had seen Christ alive was one of hardened unbelief (John 20:25).

What do I mean by hardened? I mean that he made it very clear that though they may have seen the risen Lord, the only thing he had seen with his eyes were the nails that had pierced His hands and feet and the spear that had pierced His side. That is what he had seen. And until he saw visual and tactile evidence that would erase those last very troubling, even traumatic, images from his mind, he would not believe.

Isn't that the challenge he uttered to his fellow disciples? What did he say? **“Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”** Wow! This is what we could call hardened unbelief.

So, what happened next? Let me now read for you **John 20:26**. And what does it say? **“After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them.”** And then what happened? Listen to these next words, **“Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, ‘Peace be with you.’”**

So, what is the first thing that the apostle shares with us in this verse? He, first of all, shared with us the amount of time that had elapsed since Christ last appeared to His disciples. And how long was that?

According to John, eight days had passed since Christ had appeared to His disciples, which would have meant that Christ's second appearance would have once again been on a Sunday.

So, what had changed over those past eight days? It doesn't appear that much at all had changed. The disciples, after the eight days, appear to be in the same room with the doors shut just as they had been before.

So let me ask you this question. Why would the disciples have still been there in that same room and still most likely cloistering together in fear of the Jews as they had been doing the week before in light of the fact that not

only had Christ had appeared to them but had also instructed His disciples prior to His crucifixion, in **Matthew 26:32** and once again after His resurrection through certain women in **Matthew 28:7** and **10**, to go to Galilee?

Obviously were still rather unsure of themselves and also somewhat unsure about where Christ might have wanted them specifically go in Galilee.

Therefore in spite of His appearance and also His instructions to them they apparently chose to remain in Jerusalem or in close proximity to Jerusalem while waiting for the next shoe to drop. And it did drop when Christ for a second time appeared to His disciples in the very same manner as He had appeared to His disciples.

But this time there was one very marked difference. This time Christ after His greeting, **“Peace be to you,”** singled out Thomas.

Let me now read for you **John 20:27**. **“Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.’”**

At this moment in time Jesus was doing for Thomas was He continues to do for us. He met Thomas at the point of His weakness just as Christ continues to meet us at the point of our weakness.

Christ has given us a promise in **Philippians 1:6** that he would complete in us the work that He has begun. What does the verse tell us? **“He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”** Christ is not a quitter. He is not a slacker. And He is certainly not without strength.

How does the Apostle Paul describe Christ in **Colossians 1:15-19**? Let me read these verses for you. **“He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (16) For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him. (17) He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (18) He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will**

come to have first place in everything. (19) For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him."

Can we count on Christ's promise to us as His disciples that He will complete the work He has begun in light of who He is and what He has promised us? Absolutely! This means that even when we are weak He will invariably prove Himself to be strong,

In other words, we cannot get away from Him. Picture it like this: We are on a very short leash. We may foolishly wander off from Him from time to time thinking we know a better way but I can tell you, based on the word of God and from personal experience, we will not get very far.

And this is what we are seeing here in **John 20:27**. Thomas is choosing to be unbelieving rather than to believe. He has chosen a path that for some reason seems very reasonable to him, but it is a path that will lead him nowhere. And Christ is not about to let that happen.

So, what does Christ do for him? Christ, in John 20:20, confronts Thomas at the point of His weakness in order to strengthen His faith.

And what did Christ say to him? Let me once again read for you **John 20:27**. **"Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.'"** So how will Thomas respond? Will Thomas take Jesus up on His challenge?

Whether Thomas actually took Jesus up on his challenge and touched the marks of the wounds in His hands and His side we are not told. The impression given to us in **John 20:29** in when He said to Thomas **"because you have seen"** the sight of Christ itself proved sufficient for Thomas to believe. And how did Thomas express His newfound faith?

Let me now read for you **John 20:28**. **"Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and My God!'"**

The response of Thomas to Christ confronting Him at the point of His weakness resulted in him uttering to Christ the following words, "My Lord and My God!" So, what is the significance of these words?

The word “Lord” (KURIOS) could be used either as a term of respect, much like our word, “sir,” or it could be used to convey “reverence” or “awe.”

So how was it used here? It was used in the sense of reverence and awe. And if there was any doubt about this all we have to consider the next word that Thomas used in addressing Christ. And that was the word “God.”

The word “God” (THEOS) had never been used by any disciple to address Christ prior to this declaration by Thomas here in John 20:28.

Obviously Thomas was not as much of a skeptic as he thought he was. Not only had he not needed to put his finger and his hand into the wounds of Christ in order to believe that He had risen from the dead, but His faith now went far beyond that.

Thomas, having seen Christ alive and having been invited to act upon the challenge he had earlier put forth, not only chose to believe Christ had risen but that He was in fact God. So how did Christ respond to this form of address? Did Christ rebuke or perhaps correct him ascribing to Him a name that He was not in fact worthy of? No! Christ received it. Why? He received it because He was worthy of it.

So after having received it how does He respond to Thomas? Let me now read for you **John 20:29. “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.”**

Though the NAS translates the first part of John 20:29 as a question, the NIV, which I believe is the better translation of this verse, translated it as a statement. So how does the NIV translates the first part of **John 20:29? “Because you have seen Me, you have believed.”**

In translating the verse in this way it, I believe, better captures for us the true impact of the next words of Christ to Thomas. And what were those words? **“Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.”**

Christ, having stated that Thomas had believed after seeing Him alive, then pronounced a blessing or beatitude upon those who had not seen and yet believed.

So let me ask you a question. Who is more blessed, the one who saw Christ alive and believed or the one who has not seen Christ alive and believed? And the answer is neither.

Those who saw Christ alive and believed and those who have not seen Christ alive and believed are equally blessed. This is Christ's point to Thomas and to the rest of the disciples.

And why is this? It is because it is not whether or not we have seen Christ or not seen Christ that opens the door to God's blessings, but whether or not we truly in fact believe in Christ.

So now we come to the end of this particular section of Scripture and to John's stated purpose for writing the things he has chosen to write us.

So now let me read for you **John 20:20-21**. **“Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”**

John wrote this Gospel certainly to strengthen our faith, but more importantly he wrote this Gospel so that others in reading it might come to faith in Christ (John 20:20-21).

Has Christ demonstrated His complete and total mastery over death! Yes! He manifested His complete and totally mastery over death in His dying, in His burial and in His resurrection. And therefore if you are here this morning and know that you, based on the teachings of God's Word concerning the person and work of Christ, have transferred your trust from yourself and your own good works to Jesus Christ alone for your salvation, death should no longer be a scary thing for you but rather simply a stepping stone to something far better.

May God give us the grace to understand, based on the promise of Christ and His complete mastery over death, that even if we die we will live again in the blessedness of His presence.