

Thomas the Believer

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Date: 05 April 2026

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[0:00] Friends, Christ has risen. He has risen indeed. Along with the death of Jesus, the resurrection is the central fact of Christianity.!

Chocolate eggs and feel-good symbolism. Nothing wrong with chocolate eggs, but we all know they don't come from bunnies, which is a pity because it would be really cool if they did. But we live in a real world, a world governed by hard facts and reality.

Many Christians also have their own version of the Easter story that likewise turns it into a fairy tale, because for many Christians the physical resurrection is almost as unreal or unimportant and so Easter is about sort of heavenly spirit beings wafting in and out of pieces of burial cloth or floating through doors.

Those who think Easter is a pure fairy tale will say things like, well, you've got to prove it to me. I'll believe it when I see it. Others think Christianity demands a blind faith, a leap into the dark in spite of evidence.

But both of these versions miss the one thing that actually matters, the rock-solid foundational truth that a dead man physically rose from his grave.

[1:42] That's why the story of Thomas is so important for us. Christianity is not just believe in spite of evidence, it is believe because there's evidence.

A real Christian faith is not a blind faith, nor does it treat evidence as unnecessary, it's a faith based on truth. In other words, on what actually happens in time and space.

It is not a faith based on faith, it is not a faith based on wishful thinking, it's a faith based on real things that happen in time and space.

It's a faith based on truth, which is why Thomas' journey moves from not seeing and not believing to seeing and believing.

So we're going to trace his storyline through the Scriptures. If you've got your Bibles, turn with me to John chapter 20 or your phones, which hopefully will be on silent, unlike the cars that are parked here.

[2:43] Even the cars got excited about Jesus' resurrection. We'll spend our time in John chapter 20.

So, we're chasing the story of Thomas, who moves from not seeing and not believing to seeing and believing.

So we're going to look at not seeing and not believing. The thing is, Thomas is very much like many in the modern world. He wants proof. And in fact, there's nothing wrong with that.

Thomas gets a bad rap in Christianity. We call him Doubting Thomas. But really, he was being reasonable and logical. Like Thomas, many people today won't believe without some form of evidence.

Maybe we should call him Investigative Thomas. After all, he was being asked to believe in something absolutely incredible. Adrian, can you turn the fan off by me so I don't lose my place every two minutes?

[3:53] Thanks. So I'm going to read from John chapter 20 and verse 24. Now, Thomas, one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came, when he appeared the first time.

And so the other disciples told him, We've seen the Lord. But he said to them, Yeah. Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand in his side, I will not believe.

This is why Thomas needs proof. He is being asked to believe the absolutely incredible that their dead friend had seen him and was talking to them again. Of course he wants proof of that.

And so what we see from this is that Christianity is not averse to investigation. It's not a blind faith, nor does it just say believe or believe in spite of the evidence.

No. Christianity invites investigation and says look at the evidence and base your faith on reality, on what is true. One person who did this is the author Lee Strobel.

[5:11] He wrote a couple of really well written and award winning books. The case for a creator. But the big one was the case for Christianity. The case for Jesus. Strobel started off as a hardened atheist.

And when his wife became a Christian, it irritated him so much that he set out to disprove that Jesus existed. But his investigation proved the exact opposite.

And his line of profession was as an investigative journalist for the Chicago Tribune, a really hard and gritty newspaper.

He knew how to investigate crimes and what evidence was and what he was looking for. When looking for evidence of evolution as opposed to creation, he found that the odds of life spontaneously occurring by random chance is a one in ten to the power of 40,000.

Now, I can see a lot of blank stares looking back at me. I'll give you another number. Just compare that to the actual number of atoms. Not humans, not planets, not stars, atoms.

[6:22] There's things that we can't see. If we compare that number, one in ten to the power of 40,000, I think I'm saying that right, compare that to the number of atoms in the observable universe, they're estimated to be one to ten to the power of 80, which is anyway a huge number.

Okay. To give you an idea, I'm still seeing blank faces, that's okay. To give you an idea of the immensity of these numbers, here's a smallish one for us to chew on. 111 billion T, 400,012 million and three.

Okay. That's ten to the power of 32. The number of atoms in the universe is ten to the power of 80. That's a huge number. Believe it or not, you can actually say that number. So here, this is how you say it. 100, 10 decillion, 684 nonillion, 435 octillion, 255, 7 septillion, anyway, we don't have time for this.

What's really worrying is that when I went online to say, look, how do you say this number? Google referred me to the South African Revenue Service. So somewhere there is a big number waiting for us.

[7:49] that's a tiny number compared to the number of atoms in the universe, compared to the chances that scientists have calculated that it would take for the universe to spontaneously erupt into the light that we know.

10 to the power of 40,000 zeros. That's 10 to the power of 32 zeros. Strobel concluded, to continue in atheism, I would need to believe that nothing produces everything.

I simply don't have that much faith to continue to be an atheist. In other words, it's entirely reasonable to believe that God made the universe and it is entirely unreasonable to think that there is no God and the whole thing happened by chance.

Turns out that Christianity has maths, science, and logic on its side, not the other way around. But about the resurrection, Strobel goes on, he discovered that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the best attested events of the ancient world.

And one of the reasons for that is the manuscript evidence that shows that Jesus of Nazareth is more real than Julius Caesar. So, just hands up, who believes that Julius Caesar was real?

[9:19] Most of us? Does anyone, anyone who doesn't believe, I mean, you're welcome to put your hand up, but here's the manuscript evidence that shows that Julius Caesar was real.

I'm just going to see that you can see the numbers. So, I've highlighted in red up at the top, that's Julius Caesar. He wrote his history called the Gallic Wars, that's when he invaded France and then England.

It was about plus minus 60 BC when those events happened. The earliest copy of that historical record is 900 AD.

So, he wrote it, but those things got destroyed and someone must have made a copy. The earliest copy that the world has that says that Julius Caesar is real comes a thousand years after he wrote what he wrote.

And there's a paltry ten manuscripts. Compare that to the manuscript evidence for the New Testament.

[10:20] The New Testament was written possibly between 400 and 100 AD. I think it was written earlier than that, much earlier, but tradition has it that John, who wrote the Gospel of John and wrote the book Revelation, lived till about 90 or so AD.

The earliest copy, I've seen this, it's a real fragment, it's a manuscript, I've seen it in the museum, for some strange reason it's in the museum in Dublin, in Ireland.

It's the Gospel of John and it dates to the early first century, I think it's, I think it can be dated back, or early second century, it can be dated back to the first century.

Okay? Within 25 to 50 years we've got the writings of the people that wrote the New Testament. The number of manuscripts, 24,000.

The point is, if you believe that Julius Caesar exists, or existed, but not Jesus, it shows that you're being logically inconsistent.

[11:35] You're not following the evidence that Jesus really is who he says he is. And Lee Stobel did and it changed his life. Not seeing and not believing.

But what is it precisely that Thomas wanted proof to believe in? What is it that Jesus wanted his disciples to believe happened on that first Easter Sunday?

So we're going to follow Thomas from not seeing and not believing to seeing and believing. What did he see? What did he believe? What the story of Thomas shows us is that the resurrection of Jesus is a real physical space-time event.

It's not a fairy tale. It's not a spiritual metaphor. By seeing Jesus standing in front of him, talking about Thomas now, talking to him, inviting him to touch the very marks that caused his death.

Thomas had no choice but to believe in the reality of the resurrection of Jesus back from the dead. Let me read from John chapter 20 again.

[13:08] Verse 26, A week later, his disciples were in the house again. Thomas was with them. The doors were locked. Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you.

And he said to Thomas, I'm going to paraphrase, come here. Put your finger here.

See my hands. Reach out and put your hand into my side. Stop doubting and believe.

Thomas, I think, falls to the floor and says, My Lord and my God. We can easily lose the absolute incredible reality of what Thomas' eyes were seeing.

We mustn't think that people living 2,000 years ago thought it was perfectly normal for their dead relatives to come strolling in from the graveyard. It's not like you sitting there outside your villa house and here comes Aunt Mavis back from the dead.

[14:31] Hello, Aunt Mavis. Back from the dead. Yes, dear. Jolly good. How was it? Oh, you know, dead boring.

Just to show you can have dad jokes even on a resurrection Sunday. Anyway, the point is dead people coming back to life is not normal no matter what culture you're from.

And it's absolutely vital to understand that Jesus came back from the dead. It's vital to understand the resurrection if you want to base your hope on reality and not a fairy tale.

There's a couple of things, a few things for us to wrestle with here. Firstly, the resurrected Jesus is as real, physical and human as he was before he went into the tomb.

The only difference being that he was dead, but is now alive. The point of showing him the wounds in his hands and his side is to indicate it's the same person, but also that he's not a ghost, nor is he a metaphor, nor has he evolved into a higher dimensional spirit being.

[15:56] The same Jesus who was nailed through his hands and feet, whose side was slashed open with a spear, whose heart stopped beating, and whose body was turning into a cold, dead corpse, is now standing alive in front of him.

You cannot get around that from these accounts. Okay, so now this is a direct challenge for anyone who says they're only willing to believe if they have enough evidence.

Because if seeing is believing, then you have all the proof you need in Thomas. This is the thing that changed him, seeing his dead friend back alive again.

This is the thing that broke him. This is his breaking point. He falls down in worship because he realizes at last just who Jesus is, my Lord and my God.

Nothing else can explain what his senses are seeing. But the resurrection is also a challenge to those who settle for a vague fairy tale wishful thinking type of Christianity.

[17:14] You get them at every funeral and really trust in Jesus. They most certainly don't believe in his actual resurrection and yet they will say with certainty oh Auntie Mavis whoever ah they've gone off to be in a better place.

They are smiling down on us. Things like that. And they've got no reason to say that because they don't believe in the resurrection or rather they think that's what the resurrection means.

But Jesus' resurrection doesn't mean that you go to heaven when you die. It means that one day you will come back from the dead like Jesus. And if there's one thing in your life you don't want to be vague about, it's this, whether you will come back from the dead.

Because that is the hope that is held out for everyone who believes in Jesus but hasn't seen him. So in a sense, Thomas' story ends with seeing and believing.

Well that's great for Thomas. These things happened 2,000 years ago and there's no video evidence. Even if there was, you couldn't trust it because of AI. What about us?

[18:33] How are we supposed to access the same kind of faith and the same kind of promises that are given to Thomas because he believed that Jesus is back from the dead?

We've got to think about not seeing and believing. Not seeing and believing. So not seeing and yet believing is not going against the evidence.

It's not contrary to reason or taking a blind leap of faith. It's using the evidence and using reason to know for a fact that Jesus rose from the dead.

dead. And when you do, what happens is you receive these extraordinary blessings from Jesus himself.

Peace with God and the sure and certain promise of your own physical resurrection to eternal life. John chapter 20 verse 29 Jesus told them, because you've seen me, you've believed.

[19:41] But blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Now he's talking in that past tense, but it's the way the Bible talks, it puts it in the past tense because it's so sure of happening.

What this verse is talking about is talking about us. Jesus was speaking about every person who would ever hear the gospel after that first Easter Sunday.

It includes everyone who is sitting here today or listening to this talk. The first blessing is peace with Jesus.

Peace with Jesus. Every time the risen Jesus appears, he says the same thing. Peace, be with you. Three times in this chapter alone. Peace.

Why would he say peace? It's a normal greeting in the ancient world. But he's talking to the same people that had abandoned him the night before, or the few nights earlier.

[20:54] The same people that had denied him. The same people that had left him to die. and he gives them his peace.

Any other king in history would have destroyed them. I don't have time for you. You didn't have time for me.

I'm back from the dead. Now is my time for revenge because I told you to believe in me but you didn't. Jesus isn't like any other king in history.

Instead of revenge, he comes with mercy and kindness. Instead of rebuke, he offers acceptance and invitation.

Instead of blame, he gives forgiveness and pardon. He reconciles his enemies and turns them into his friends. friends, this is the same peace that is offered to you this Easter.

[21:57] If you trust that Jesus came back from the dead. It's a peace that the Bible tells us that surpasses understanding.

It's peace with your past. It's peace in your soul. It's peace with God. The first blessing we get from Christ is peace with him, peace within ourselves and peace with our maker, our creator.

It turns him from being our judge into our merciful, loving, kind and gracious heavenly father. The second blessing, there's another one.

If you trust in the resurrection of Christ, this is perhaps the greatest blessing of all. It's the blessing of a life that will last forever. you get the blessing of a life that will last forever.

Jesus promises that if you believe he rose from the dead, he will raise you from the dead as well. John tells us that this is the entire purpose of his gospel.

[23:08] Later in the same chapter, John 20 verse 31, he says, these things 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.

Now we can't fully comprehend what an amazing gift this is from God. We get to live forever. forever. This is the central hope of the Bible as far as I'm concerned.

All the other promises make this promise happen. The forgiveness of sins, the giving of the Holy Spirit, God's Word, the Church, all the other blessings make this blessing happen.

You get to live forever. We get to survive death, and just like Jesus, have our bodies transformed, so they will have the same abilities as Jesus' body.

So we don't just come back as we went into the grave, thank goodness, that wouldn't be fun. We don't want to run around as zombies our whole life. But we don't just come back as ourselves, we get this transformed, changed body.

[24:24] Philippians 3 says this, Paul is writing to the Church to encourage him, and he says, we eagerly await a Savior from heaven, I'm just going to make the point that that's from heaven, we're not eagerly awaiting a Savior to go to heaven to be with him, we eagerly await a Savior from heaven, heaven is there, earth is here, that means it's coming here, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, there's his lordship, what's he going to do with all that power?

He will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body, that is the best news I think you can get, not just this Easter but for your entire life.

It is trusting in Jesus' resurrection that we can be sure of ours, and what a day that will be. Think about your resurrection for a moment.

We're all going to end up in the grave. The promise of Jesus is that he will get you out of it. One day Jesus is going to call each of us by name.

He's going to tell us to wake up, just like he told Lazarus. And just like Lazarus, we're going to stand up from wherever we died or we're buried or goodness knows what happens to us when we die these days.

[26:05] I mean, to your body, you never know where it goes, but he's going to call us by name. Just like Lazarus, we're going to get up. And just like Jesus on that first Easter Sunday, our brain neurons will start firing because they've been dead, they haven't been working for however long it's taken for Jesus to call your name.

Our heart will start beating a strong unstoppable rhythm. Our lungs will fill with the most sweetest aromatic oxygen and our eyes will open to a world with endless beauty and possibilities and adventures.

a world waiting for us to explore in bodies with capacities and abilities that we can only dream of.

Why would you want to swap that promise for anything else? to conclude, the resurrection of Jesus calls you to stop believing in your own version of what Easter is all about.

Whether you're an unbeliever or a believer, the real Easter events are way better than any fairy tale. The resurrection of Jesus is the central fact of Christianity.

[27:50] It is the central fact of history. And if it becomes the central fact of your life, it will change the outcome of your story.

Paul writes a famous chapter, an entire chapter on the resurrection, 1 Corinthians chapter 15. But he ends like this. He says, listen, I'm going to tell you a mystery.

We will not all sleep. but we will all be changed in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed. And when the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true.

Death has been solid up in victory. Where, death, is your victory? Where, death, is your sting? It's gone. The sting of death is sin.

[29:00] The power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well, let me pray for us that this becomes our reality this Easter. Lord Jesus, we struggle to comprehend the amazingness of this truth.

That gloriously bright morning when the folded grave clothes were left in the tomb that was then filled with light.

and the angels announced that Christ is risen. And this wonderful promise that we are raised with him, that death is dead, that love is one, that Christ has conquered, and we shall reign with him, for he lives.

Christ is risen from the dead. Amen. Amen.