



**Temple Baptist Church**  
Wilmington, North Carolina  
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The Lord's Day, April 8, 2018

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**To the Scared and the Skeptic**  
**John 20:19-31**

On that first Easter morning, the day Jesus rose, Mary Magdalene hadn't just seen the empty tomb and the angels; she had seen Jesus! He was alive! She had talked with Him and clung to His feet. She *knew* He was alive!

So she had gone to the disciples and told them **that she had seen the Lord** (John 20:18).<sup>1</sup> And she had given Jesus' instructions to His disciples.

***Unexpected appearances***

Later that same day, Jesus' disciples had gathered together behind locked doors. They were *scared*. We can understand that, can't we? I mean, just three days earlier, their leader had been executed. What was to keep the Jewish authorities from coming after them now to snuff out any possible remnant of Jesus' teaching or influence?

And then it had happened. With the doors locked, suddenly Jesus was standing among them. He greeted them by saying, "**Peace be with you**" (20:19).

Can you imagine their astonishment? To show them it was really Jesus Himself, He showed them the wounds in his hands from His crucifixion and the wound in His side from the spear. Needless to say, they were overjoyed!

Then He told them again, "**Peace to you. As the Father has sent Me, I also send you**" (20:21). He breathed on them and said, "**Receive the Holy Spirit.**" Then He told them, "**If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.**" (20:22-23).

Now it just so happened that Thomas the Twin, who was one of the original twelve disciples, wasn't with them when Jesus appeared to them that evening.

We don't know why—maybe he was disillusioned by what had happened to Jesus. He'd always seemed to be a bit of a pessimist. In John 11, when Jesus told the twelve that He was going to Lazarus to raise him, Thomas said to the others, "**Let us also go, that we may die with Him**" (John 11:16). When Jesus had told the disciples in the upper room that He was going to prepare a place for them, and that they knew the way to where He was going, Thomas said, "**Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?**" (John 14:5). All he knew now was that Jesus had gone. And that evening, he wasn't with the others.

But later on Thomas was there. And however pessimistic he might have been, he was also incredibly loyal. Something had drawn him to be with these fellow-followers of Jesus. So when he finally got there—later that evening or some other time that week—the other disciples told him the same thing Mary had told them: "**We have seen the Lord**" (20:25).

When they said this, Thomas the pessimist became Thomas the *skeptic*. He told the others, "**Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and put**

**my hand into His side, I will not believe” (20:25).**

He was just too skeptical. Even though he had fled, he knew what had happened to Jesus. And more than likely, at least from a distance, he had seen Jesus hanging on the cross, battered almost beyond recognition. To say now that Jesus was alive—that was just too good to be true! It had to be a group hallucination or His ghost or something. Dead men just don’t come back to life until the resurrection at the last day!

A week later, they were all together again on the first day of the week. Something had drawn Thomas back.

Again, they were meeting behind locked doors. And once again, Jesus came and stood in their midst and greeted them, **“Peace to you” (20:26).**

Then He looked at Thomas—*doubting* Thomas, we call him. *Skeptical* Thomas or *agnostic* Thomas might be the better designation. In any case, Jesus looked at Thomas and said, **“Reach your finger here and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing” (20:27).**

And suddenly, Thomas’ doubt and skepticism melted away. He didn’t have to touch the nail-prints or put his hand in the wound in Jesus’ side. It was enough that the risen Lord Jesus had come to him. He responded with one of the most emphatic declarations of Jesus’ divinity anywhere in Scripture: **“My Lord and my God!” (20:28).**

So Jesus responded by saying to him, **“Thomas, because you have seen Me you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and yet have believed” (20:29).**

### ***Peace and proof***

To His ten *scared* disciples, Jesus spoke peace. He demonstrated that He was the same Jesus who had died, but now had been raised, never to die again. And He gave them a commission to continue His mission in the world, sharing in the work the Father sent Him to accomplish. He empowered them for His mission with the Holy Spirit and the authority to forgive or retain sins.

But His *skeptical* disciple, Thomas, wasn’t there when Jesus first came. So Jesus came and appeared again a week later, specifically to show Himself to Thomas. And to the skeptic He spoke peace, as a part of the group. He then lovingly demonstrated to him that He was the same Jesus who had died, and invited him to do just as he said he must do to believe, and told him, **“Do not be unbelieving, but believing”**

In other words, *after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His scared and skeptical disciples with peace and proof.*

John tells us in his summary in 20:30-31 that these selected signs are recorded to encourage belief in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. The risen Lord Jesus Christ is the same Jesus who had died. He had risen!

And today, *through the apostolic witness of Scripture, Jesus brings peace and life to all who trust in Him.*

### ***The basis of our faith***

You see, *our faith is based on both historical fact and eternal reality.* We don’t ask people to believe based on philosophic explanation or speculation or fables.

Jesus of Nazareth was a historical figure, who lived and was crucified by the order of the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate. These facts are attested in Roman and Jewish historical writings, as well as the writings of the New Testament. He was raised from the dead by God the

Father through the power of the Holy Spirit, and was seen and witnessed by His followers on numerous occasions, by as many as 500 at one time, according to the tradition that Paul quotes in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. In the Old Testament, the testimony of two or three witnesses was considered valid. When it comes to Jesus, there are *multiple witnesses*—indeed, a *multitude* of witnesses—individually and corporately, not only to Jesus’ life and death, but also to His appearances after His resurrection!

So now we receive that apostolic eyewitness that comes to us in Scripture and pass it on. Jesus clearly demonstrated to His followers after His death and resurrection that He was the same person (John 20), and that He was truly risen and not a ghost (Luke 24:36-43). There is a *continuity* in His existence before and after His resurrection, and yet a different *quality* (He was no longer bound by time and space). What He experienced was resurrection, *not* resuscitation!

These are historical facts; they are also eternal realities. And together they form the basis of our faith. Though we haven’t seen Him with our own eyes, we accept the testimony of those who have, and we put our faith in Him. And in doing so, we are incredibly blessed!

But don’t miss this. Just as the Father has sent Him, *Jesus has sent and empowered us to share in His mission* of proclaiming His good news to the scared, the skeptic, and everyone else! We *must* pass on this good news we have received, so that others who haven’t seen may yet believe, and so that believers may grow in faith as we all find life in His name!

### ***When we are scared and skeptical***

Now before we can bear witness to this good news, we must really believe it. Yet so often in our lives as individuals and our life together as a congregation, we are tempted to be scared or skeptical, or both.

Sometimes when we’re facing trials or difficulties like sickness, grief, financial crisis, or strained or broken relationships, we get scared. We begin to wonder how or why God could or would let something like this happen to us. Doubts begin to arise and fears begin to dismay.

But it is precisely in those moments that we must cling for dear life to Christ’s victory through His death and resurrection! We must remember that He went through suffering and death, laying down His life for us before He took it up again in His resurrection! As Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 1:8-9:

**For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia; that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had received the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead . . .**

It’s when things are the darkest and at their worst that we learn to rely most fully on God who raises the dead! Just as Golgotha’s sorrow gave way to Easter morning, so our suffering gives way to the hope that God is working in all our circumstances to bring about His purpose through His resurrection power that’s at work in us and that will raise us with Christ at the last day!

And that’s true for us in our life together as a church as well. When we face uncertainty in times of trial or transition, it’s easy to fall into fear or to become skeptical about how God is working in the midst of the situation.

But when we understand that ours is a resurrection faith, and that God is in control and is working to bring about something that’s beyond what we can see with our physical eyes, our

fears begin to fade and our skepticism gives way to quiet trust. We remember that just as John saw in his vision of the glorified Christ in Revelation 1:9-20, our risen Lord is present among His churches!

Because ultimately, when we really believe in the God who raises the dead and in Jesus Christ His crucified but risen Son, it will make a difference in how we live and how we live together as the family of God. His resurrection power is indeed good news to the scared and skeptical!

The German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg, in a conversation with *Prism* magazine, put it this way:

The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live.<sup>2</sup>

Or as the conductor in the children's Christmas movie *The Polar Express* put it: "Sometimes seeing is believing. And sometimes the most real things in the world are the things we can't see."<sup>3</sup>

**"Blessed *are* those who have not seen, and yet have believed!"**

**†MEG**

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture taken from the New King James Version.

<sup>2</sup> Cited on [www.preachingtoday.com](http://www.preachingtoday.com).

<sup>3</sup> *The Polar Express* (Warner Brothers, 2004), written by Chris Van Allsberg and Robert Zemeckis, directed by Robert Zemeckis. Cited on [www.preachingtoday.com](http://www.preachingtoday.com).