

My Lord and My God, Tim Keller

The scripture reading is taken from the book of John, chapter 20, verses 24 through 31.

²⁴Now Thomas, (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." ²⁶A week later, his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." ³⁰Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹But these 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.

The word of the Lord.

Now, Thomas is the most famous doubter of the resurrection for sure. And that helps us today because many people say it's just impossible in our modern day to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So, will Thomas give us any help here? Is it possible to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ in our modern age? Now some of you say, "Well, I'm here and I'm a Christian and I believe in the resurrection." I thought I believed in the resurrection too. Then I got diagnosed with thyroid cancer. And it turned out I did believe in the resurrection and I do come to see, I didn't believe in the resurrection in such a way, or maybe I should say my faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not as consoling, was not as empowering, was not as life transforming as it should have been. So, when we look at Thomas and we see him coming from skepticism into faith, this helps us all because everyone here either doesn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ or says they do, but doesn't believe anywhere near in as robust and as firm and as life transforming a way as they should. And therefore, let's take a look and ask the question, by looking at this very famous account of Thomas, let's ask this question. **Why didn't Thomas believe? Why was he doubtful and skeptical? And then secondly, how did he come to believe in the resurrection?**

Now, we're not going to take too much time on this first question. Why was Thomas so skeptical? Partly because the text doesn't really tell us, so we're speculating, but I'd like you to see that the speculation is somewhat helpful because even as we think about reasons that Thomas might not have believed and been so skeptical, they help us because they're all

the reasons that we today have that make it difficult for us to believe. So, for example, one possibility is that Thomas was skeptical because of his temperament. Now, I'm not sure, maybe some of you could research this, but I don't think they had the Myers-Briggs personality inventory back then. I don't know. I'm not sure. But if they had, he would have come up as what was called a sensing person rather than an intuitive person. What the Myers-Briggs personality test says is that a sensing personality or temperament, sensing people pay more attention to physical reality, facts, hard, cold evidence, whereas intuitives, these are people who go more on perceptions and instincts. And therefore, it's harder to get a sensing person to believe unless you've got really hard, cold evidence. So, it's maybe, you know, it's possible if you're a sensing person rather than intuitive person, you can look at Thomas and say, yep, that's me. So, he represents you.

Another possibility is that Thomas was skeptical of the supernatural period. He might've really in his head said, "Dead people don't rise in the dead. I mean, they don't rise. They just don't. Miracles can't happen." Now it's not real likely, but on the other hand, modern people have a worldview that says miracles don't happen. Dead people can't rise. And therefore, us modern people who find it just difficult to believe in the supernatural, we can read this and Thomas sort of represents us. It's probably not his problem, but it might've been, he might've been a modern man born out of time, as you might say.

But there's a third possible reason why Thomas was so dubious and has nothing to do with the rationality. We often tend to think, well, skepticism always comes from the head. Doubts come from the head, not necessarily. For example, I certainly as a pastor have seen people all the time. I've watched people die slowly and the loved ones around them, the people who love the dying person go through a tremendous, tremendous agony. And part of it is they have hope, they have hope. And then finally their hopes are dashed and they, through great agony, they have to come to the conclusion, no, he or she is going to die. Well, then what happens is suddenly somebody comes along and says, "Hey, let's fly them to another country. And there's a treatment there that might save their lives." And I often find that the friends and the family of the loved one do not say, "Great!" What they say is, "Do not get my hopes up again. I can't bear it. I don't want that to be true out there. I can't bear to get my hopes back up and then have to go through losing them all over again." Something like that might've happened here with Thomas.

Thomas gets a bad rap, don't you think? Doubting Thomas. There's no indication in the Bible that he didn't love Jesus as much as every other disciple. And there's no reason not to believe that he wasn't just as every bit as devastated. And now they come along and they say, "Guess what? He's alive." And he's looking at them and he's saying, "Don't you dare get my hopes up. I cannot possibly even begin to hope in this unless I see a living person with gaping lethal wounds in their body. Then I'll know it's not an imposter." So, there's a certain sense in which maybe it's his emotions. Maybe he's just afraid to hope. So, these are all the

reasons, by the way, that we have trouble believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You might have a worldview that just says, "No, it can't happen!" Worldviews can be wrong, by the way. You might have a temperament that says, "No, no, no, I just need more evidence." Or you may have a heart that says, "I'm afraid of being drawn into something and being disappointed." And it's not so much a matter of the head, but the heart. But for all these reasons, whoever you are, whatever your reasons, you can see yourself in Thomas. But you got to see that Thomas, the great doubter, in the end says, "My Lord and my God!" And almost all readers of the Bible over the years have said it's weird because here he's the biggest doubter of the whole group. And yet his confession of faith, he doesn't just say, "Oh, Jesus, you're alive again." He says, "Not only are you my Lord, but you are my God!" To say that to a human being, a Jewish man, to say that to a human being. There's no higher confession of faith in all of the Bible. So, here's a guy that goes from zero to 60, you might say, who's really the biggest doubter becomes the greatest believer. So, there's hope. I don't care who you are. There's hope. There's hope for us all.

So, the question then is, how did he come to believe? And I would like to say that by observing not only what he did do, but even what he didn't, I would say there's four ways. Four ways that you can move from dubiousness and doubt toward faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And those four ways are:

- 1) You have to listen to the eyewitnesses.
- 2) You have to see he's seeking you.
- 3) You have to understand the meaning of glorified wounds
- 4) And you have to drop your conditions.

Here, let's go through them. Number one, listen to the eyewitnesses.

Now, what do I mean by eyewitnesses? Well, notice in verse 25, well, actually verses 19 to 24 tells us that Jesus, the risen Christ, appeared to the disciples in a particular room and Thomas wasn't there. One week later, he shows up again and Thomas sees him. But in that week, what happened was, verse 25 says, the other disciples kept telling him, "We have seen the Lord." In fact, the Greek verb behind the English translation here is a present progressive. So, it says they kept on telling him, "We've seen him, we've seen him, we've seen him!" And during that week, Thomas kept saying, "I don't care what you say, I just can't believe it." But the eyewitnesses were talking to Thomas and there is a sense in which Thomas is in the very same spot that you and I are in. Do you know that? Because he also had access to what you and I have access to and that is eyewitness accounts of people who actually saw Jesus raised from the dead. Now, Thomas' eyewitness accounts were from

people who were alive. You and I have the same eyewitness accounts too, do you know that? But they're written down now, they're in the New Testament. Because the New Testament, especially the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are actually eyewitness accounts of, this is the apostles and the New Testament is written by the I went to, if you went to college in America in the 1950s or 60s, and I went to college at the very end of that time, the very end, just remember that. You're always told this, and that is that the New Testament documents were legends, written down long after the events and so they were not trustworthy in any way. But between that time and now, there has been a ton, there is an enormous amount of scholarship that actually argues that the gospels do not have the marks of fiction. They do not have the marks of fiction writing, rather they have the marks of oral history, of being eyewitness testimony. Now, we're not going to spend more time on this because if you come back, I hope you do, if this is, you have not been to Reading Room before, come back next week and maybe the next because we're going to be looking just for this, during this Easter season at these texts about the risen Jesus and the accounts of eyewitnesses, and we'll look more at this. But the fact is that in ancient times, when you wrote a historic document, the way to vouch for its authenticity was you would name eyewitnesses who had seen the things you're talking about, and those eyewitnesses should be alive so that you could actually go to them. That's the reason why in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul's writing like 20 years after these events, and he says, at one point, Jesus Christ had actually appeared to 500 people at once, at once, which is, by the way, hard to fake. And he said, even though it was 20 years later, almost all of them were still alive. They were eyewitnesses, and he said, if you don't believe me, go talk to them. And Paul could not possibly have written this unless there really were eyewitnesses who said, "I saw him," and they saw him not just one off, but in a mass. So, the Bible actually is filled with eyewitness account, and Jesus actually says, that should be all you need, because you see here in verse 29, he says, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

Now, somebody has said, "Well, wait a minute," if he's saying to Thomas, 'You should have believed the eyewitnesses, you shouldn't need to actually see me in order to believe.' Why did he show up to Thomas?" And don't forget this, Thomas is an apostle. And those first apostles were sent out to be the original teachers and evangelists, you might say, and they all were, one of the marks of an apostle was they were trained by Jesus and they saw him risen. So, all Jesus is doing here is he's actually qualifying Thomas to be an apostle.

But he immediately says in verse 29, you really don't need that. Why? Because let me ask you a question, how many of the things you believe happened in history did you actually see? I'm waiting. What percentage? 99.999999, right? I mean, you hardly saw anything. You've probably never seen a historical event, probably, maybe some of you did, but you get to be my age, you actually have seen a couple. The reason that you don't is because you actually believe eyewitness testimony that's written down by other historically reliable authors. And so, Jesus is saying, there's no reason in the world, since you already believe in

all kinds of things in history, on the base of eyewitness accounts, that you can't do it for me. And he says, blessed, there's plenty of people who do and plenty of people who have. So, here's the first thing you need to do. If you want to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, start reading the gospels, in fact, present progressive, immerse yourself in the gospels, keep reading the gospels, read them as eyewitness accounts, and just see how well they stand up. And you will see as time goes on, they become persuasive. Think! Think, use your reason. Listen to the eyewitnesses. That's number one.

Number two, though, if you want to find faith in Jesus Christ, at some point, you need to see that he's actually, it's not just you trying to find him, but he's actually reaching out to find you. I can't tell you how many times I've talked to people who have found faith. In fact, you heard from a couple this morning that at a certain point, you feel like, gosh, "Why is it so hard to believe in God? I'm trying, I'm trying. Why doesn't God be giving me more evidence? Why is God playing so hard to get?" When you start off looking for faith, you almost always feel like you're on your own and God's not helping a bit. And almost always, as you get closer, you begin to wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. You begin to say, "I wouldn't even be seeking unless he was helping me."

Now, how do we know that? Why is it that Thomas, knowing that Jesus appeared last week, which at least according to the eyewitness accounts, and now appears this week. During that time, he kept saying, "I won't believe," he said to his disciples, "I won't believe unless I put my hands on his side. I won't believe unless I put my hands on his side." And Jesus shows up and says, "Hey, put your hands on my side." And what is Thomas thinking? "How did you know I said that? Where did you hear that?" And suddenly, see, the reason he's so shocked here, Jesus says, you know, "Put your hands on my side." And he goes, "My Lord, oh my God!" Why is he so shocked? Because he realizes Jesus was listening all along. Jesus was right at his elbow. Jesus was right at his side.

You know, when C.S. Lewis wrote his Narnia Chronicles, one of the chronicles is called The Horse and His Boy. And it's a story about a boy named Shasta, and he's in a far-off country, and he hears about Narnia, this wonderful country, Narnia, and about its king, Aslan, a lion king. And he wants to get to, he tries to escape his country to get to Narnia. And all during the time of him trying to escape, you know, everything seems to be going wrong, everything seems to be going wrong. So, I'm trying to get to Narnia, I'm trying to get to Narnia, and trying to get to the king of Narnia, Aslan, and everything's going wrong. And then one day, in a fog, a voice speaks to him, of course, it's Aslan the king, he doesn't know who it is at first, and starts talking to him about this whole escapade of him trying to escape and how hard it's been. And at one point, he says to the voice, "Well, don't you think it's been such bad luck that I keep running into so many lions?" said Shasta. "Oh, there was only one lion," said the voice. "What do you mean?" "I was the lion." And as Shasta gaped, the voice continued, "I was the lion who forced you to join with Erebus. I was the cat who comforted you among the

houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you as you slept. I was the lion who gave the horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Loon in time. And I was the lion, you do not remember at all, who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat wakeful at midnight to receive you.”

C.S. Lewis is remembering his own journey to faith from being an atheist, when he realized at a certain point he was not actually trying to find God so much as God was trying to find him. In other words, he would not even have been wanting, even seeking. You look back and you see all the ways in which your life has been arranged, and you realize, “Wait a minute, wait a minute, he’s after me. He hears, he listens.” And that’s the second thing that seems to have helped Thomas a lot and starts to melt his heart.

So listen to the eyewitnesses. Secondly, realize he’s after you. Thirdly, understand the meaning of the glorified wounds. Now, what do I mean by that? Well, look, let’s notice one of the most interesting things about the whole passage, and that is, it’s all been about, I want to touch his wounds, I want to put my hand in his wounds, I want to put my hand in his wounds, I want to touch. And Jesus shows up and says, okay, touch. Does Thomas touch? No, there’s no indication. He immediately says, my Lord and my God, he doesn’t touch. Why not? A couple of reasons, and here’s one of them. I believe that Thomas thought that the wounds were mainly evidence that Jesus Christ was alive. If I see these big, gaping wounds in a living body, then I’ll know he’s alive. But actually, when he actually saw them, they were evidence of something else that was even more powerful.

What do I mean? Let’s ask the question, why would a resurrection body have the wounds in it? I mean, this is supposed to be a body not subject to death, right? So, if you get a perfect body not subject to death, why in the world would you still have the wounds in it? I mean, there’s a lot, those of us who believe we’re going to get a resurrection body, there’s a lot of things in our present body we hope are not on our resurrection body, like our nose or our ears and things like that, you know, our height, our width, our depth. Never mind, let’s not go there. The real question is, why in the world would you still have the wounds there? And the principle is profound. The principle is found in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 17, where St. Paul writes this. He says, he calls them our slight and momentary afflictions, our sufferings, are preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. Now, he’s not saying we’re suffering here, but God is going to, at the end of time, God’s going to give us a glory that will console us for our suffering. That would be great enough, but he doesn’t say that. He says, listen, have you come to grips with this verse? He says, our sufferings are preparing the glory. What in the world could that mean?

It works at at least three levels. The first level is it means so many of us know that it’s the biggest wounds in our lives that have driven us to God. Do you realize that if you really do

believe with all your heart and all your soul in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that those who believe in him will be raised too. Do you realize it means you're not afraid of anything at all? I mean, you know, without that, of course, you can get yourself reconciled to that. When you die, that's it. But to really know that that's beyond the grave for you. I mean, it's a step. Do you really believe that means there's nothing you're afraid of? It brings astounding joy. Now, if it takes something bad in your life to drive you to that, that bad thing is a wound. It doesn't go away just because you believe in God. It doesn't go away. Belief in the resurrection. It doesn't. It's a wound. It hurts. It stays hurting. And yet your life is inexpressibly richer. It's a glorified wound. It's in other words, our wounds prepare the glory in that sense. But there's a second sense.

And here's this. When Jesus Christ says to Thomas, look at my wounds, he's seen them before. You know that, right? All the disciples saw them before. Where did he, they saw them inflicted. They saw the spear go into his side. They saw the nails go into his hands. And when they saw those wounds, they thought those wounds meant the destruction of all their hopes. They thought those wounds were ruining their lives as well as ruining Jesus' life, of course. And now Jesus Christ comes back and says, guess what, Tom, the things you thought were ruining your life have saved your life. It's my wounds dying on the cross, paying the penalty for your sins so all of your sins can be forgiven and so the Holy Spirit can come into your life and so you can be saved. The things you thought were ruining your life are actually, have saved your life.

And then there's a third level. And the third level is this, is what Paul says, and it's beyond our ability, but when Paul says our sufferings are preparing an eternal way to glory, it's got this, everybody, now hear this, it means the greatest terrible things that have happened to you, if you believe in Jesus and rest in him, every terrible thing that's ever happened to you will only make your eventual glory and joy greater. And that's the ultimate defeat of evil in your life, the ultimate defeat. So, Jesus Christ is saying to Tom, now do you understand why he didn't, why he didn't touch? Jesus Christ is saying to, not only to him, but to you, he says, "Look at my wounds and realize that if you rest in me, the things you thought were ruining your life, you will find out will save your life, just as my wounds that you thought was destroying my life was actually my means for my greatest triumph." So when Thomas originally said, "I want to see the wounds because the wounds are evidence that he's alive," Jesus says, "No, no, the wounds are actually evidence that I love you." The resurrected Jesus is not saying, "Look at me, look what I can do, I can rise from the dead," he's saying, "Look at these, look how much I love you, look what I was willing to do for you." And see, at that point, that just, I think, broke through to Thomas. And he suddenly said, "You've done this for me, it's all for me."

And that leads us to the last thing. Drop your conditions. What do I mean by drop your conditions. Probably the reason why Thomas didn't touch, was he realized at that moment

that he'd actually said, "I'll obey..." well, he says, "So, I will not obey unless, I will obey if." Now, everybody who comes toward Jesus and wants to believe in Jesus and moves toward Jesus, everybody I've ever seen, including me, you always start with conditions. You never go for Jesus' sake. You never go just because he's wonderful and great, you always go because you want something, which means you've got conditions. And you often have negative conditions, like you say, "Well, I'd like to become a Christian, but not if this happens, only if this happens." One of the very first people I ever talked to about Christianity after I became a pastor said, "Let me get this straight, if I become a Christian, does that mean I'm going to have to forgive my sister-in-law and start talking to her?" And I remember saying, "Yeah." But, you know, in a way, okay, we just laughed at a guy. I could say, "Well, yeah, eternal life forever, but on the other hand, I have to talk to my sister-in-law, I don't know." And so we can laugh at him, I don't even remember the guy's name, that's the reason why I'm telling you about him. But now, laugh at yourself. Because everybody's got something, they say, "Well, yeah, you know, eternal life and all that, but I don't know, I don't want it to hurt my career, I don't know, you know, I don't know." Drop your conditions! You know why? A condition is saying, I'll love you if. But Jesus didn't do that. Jesus loved you unconditionally. He didn't look down from heaven saying, "Well, let me find the more worthy people out there." No, he wouldn't need to come. The Bible says, while we were still enemies, he died for us. He loves us unconditionally. He looks into your life, into your heart, sees everything. He sees all your flaws, and he still dies for you.

You know that 1991 movie, *The Fisher King*, with Jeff Bridges and Robin Williams? Amanda Plummer plays a klutzy, an incredibly good job of playing a klutzy young woman, who is very clumsy, awkward socially, clumsy physically, has no friends, doesn't like herself. But Robin Williams is a homeless guy who sees her, watches her, and is in love with her. Jeff Bridges cleans him up, you know, gets him a suit, gets him a bath, so he can go out with her. And he goes out with her, and they have a wonderful night. But as soon as the date's over, Amanda Plummer says, "Well, I never want to see you again, because if you get to know me, you won't like me. I had a wonderful time, but it's too painful. If you get to know me, you won't like me." And Robin Williams, this is like a paraphrase, but I did get, I looked at the screenplay, but this is what he says. He basically says, "You don't understand, I've seen you, I know everything about you." He says, "I know you're kind of clumsy, I know you don't have friends, I know you have awkward, you're awkward in relationships, I know you don't like yourself, I know all this, but you know what? I still love you. I've seen it all, and I still love you. And I'll never leave you." And she goes up and touches him like this and says, "You're real? You're real!" But you see, there's already somebody like that who's really real. Because actually, Robin Williams is a great actor, but that was just a character in a movie. But there's somebody who's really real, who's looked into your life and unconditionally loved you, and how can you come to grips with somebody who's unconditionally loved you, loving you, without you unconditionally giving yourself to him? So, listen to the eyewitnesses.

Realize he's seeking you. Understand the meaning of glorified wounds and what that promises, and drop your conditions.

Stop doubting and believe. Let's pray.

Thank you, Father, for giving us this time to think of the greatness of the resurrection and see all the ways in which you help us to believe in it, because, oh, to know the power of the resurrection, even now in this life, is an astounding, astounding assurance and promise. Help us to do that now, through your Son, Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.