

“NOW I KNOW WHY I BELIEVE”

John 20:19-31

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In matters of faith, some people are abysmally gullible.

Like hatchlings in a bird nest, they swallow indiscriminately anything served up by their preacher or priest.

We've learned that people can grow older without getting wiser.

A particularly credulous woman said she would believe it if her preacher told her it was Jonah who swallowed the whale.

That's not faith. That's stupidity.

The core truths of Christianity may stretch your faith, but they won't insult your intelligence.

- Christians believe that God has revealed his truth to us in his Word, the Bible.

The Bible clearly states that personal faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior is the only way to be forgiven of all your sins and to receive eternal life.

That is the core, essential tenet of the Christian faith.

Jesus made this perfectly clear in his teaching, as did his apostles (see John 3:15-16, 3: 36, 5:24; 11:25; Acts 10:43; Romans 10:9; 1 John 5:1).

- According to God's Word, Jesus Christ arose from the dead. This is the cornerstone of Christian faith.

The apostle Paul wrote, *'And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. . . But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.'* (1 Corinthians 15:14, 20)

- Let us read what happened in a meeting between Jesus and his disciples on the day of his resurrection, and in another meeting one week later. (John 20:19-31)

¹⁹ *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"*

²⁰ *After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

²¹ *Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*

²² *And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.*

²³ *If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

²⁴ *Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.*

²⁵ *So 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 it."*

²⁶ *A 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!"*

²⁷ *Then 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."*

²⁸ *Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"*

²⁹ *Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

³⁰ *Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.*

³¹ *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Jesus Christ's resurrection from the grave was the climax of his work on earth, but not the conclusion.

When the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples on the evening of his resurrection, he did not say, *"The Father and I would like to thank the world for its kind indulgence in allowing us to put on this performance.*

We've enjoyed this 33-year long drama among you all. But that was the final scene. Now good night and good luck!"

The resurrection was not an exhibition, as deity flexed its almighty muscle in the face of puny humanity before disappearing once again into eternity.

- When I read the narrative of the resurrection and Christ's subsequent appearances to his disciples, then I know why I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior and my Lord.

In John 20:19-31 we find two reasons to have a steadfast faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

I. THE COMPELLING EVIDENCE OF HIS RESURRECTION. John 20:19-20, 24-31

One of the last utterances Jesus made on the cross was, *'It is finished!'*

Those who heard him may have thought he meant, *'That's all there is.'* The Romans had crucified another Jewish felon.

But it wasn't a conclusion.

It was the climax of Christ's suffering the penalty for mankind's sins. The cross was a graphic expression of our holy God's unbending justice.

Then the lifeless body of Jesus was laid in a burial tomb, only to break out victoriously on the third day.

But Jesus did not immediately exit the cosmos. He didn't even relax for a while.

There are some excellent spas at the Dead Sea where all the salts in the mud do wonders for skin abrasions.

That could have been a healing balm for Jesus' hands and feet and side.

- But Jesus had a passion to ensure that the faith of his disciples was firmly established.

¹⁹ *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"*

They were afraid the temple guards would soon come to arrest them all.

- And then, suddenly, Jesus was among them saying, *'Peace be with you!'*

²⁰ *After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

Jesus' earthly mission was not complete. He could not rest until his disciples had become firm believers.

Someone said, *'The cross without faith is like a vaccine without a syringe.'* (Michael Griffiths).

Faith is like a syringe that injects the power of Christ's resurrection into our lives.

- There is a belief system called "Universalism." One form of it claims that people may be saved by Christ without ever having heard of him (Karl Rahner). Those who espouse this view say that Jesus took the punishment for sin for everyone, and therefore Jesus is the Savior of all people, whether they believe it or not. They say the Christian gospel is the good news that in Jesus all human beings have already been reconciled to God (Karl Barth).

But if people are saved and receive eternal life whether they know it or not, then why did Jesus wait around for 40 days (Acts 1:3) after his resurrection before returning to the Father?

He could have just returned directly from the tomb to heaven if people didn't need to know that he died on the cross for them and had arisen from the dead, or that they need to believe in him. All the world would be saved, even if people didn't know it.

That's not what the Bible teaches!

In this narrative we see Jesus' unrelenting emphasis on faith after his resurrection.

He was restless until Thomas believed.

²⁴ *Now Thoms (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.*

²⁵ *So 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 it."*

You've probably heard of Murphy's Law. It says that *'If anything can go wrong, it will.'* Let me suggest the Apostles' Corollary to Murphy's Law: *'The member who most needs to be present will be absent from the meeting.'*

It's obvious that Thomas was the disciple who needed most of all to be at the meeting.

Thomas was the quintessential pessimist. Once, when Lazarus in Bethany lay sick and soon would die, Jesus said to his disciples, *'Let us go back to Judea.'* His disciples objected: *'But Rabbi, a short time ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?'* Thomas the prophet of doom said, *'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'* (John 11:7-8, 16)

Thomas was fiercely loyal to Jesus, but he was the consummate skeptic.

²⁶ *A 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!"*

²⁷ *Then 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."*

Jesus would not let Thomas languish in unbelief.

Jesus' body was transformed after his resurrection. It was imbued with properties it did not previously have.

We should probably understand that during the 40 days after his resurrection Jesus presented himself in a literal physical form only when necessary, like this occasion.

He invited Thomas to touch him and feel that his body was real. Jesus wasn't a ghost.

Jesus would not rest until Thomas had an steadfast faith.

²⁸ *Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"*

- This account strengthens my Christian faith.

The disciples did not concoct a cockamamie story about a resurrection.

One of the disciples refused to believe without seeing and touching.

Thomas demanded conclusive evidence. Then he believed.

²⁹ *Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

Jesus makes a point of commending those who are able to believe on the basis of the testimony of the apostles. That's us.

- The fact that Jesus did not consider his mission complete until his disciples were convinced proves that people must believe in order to be saved.

Jesus came to the disciple who could not believe and presented him with the proof he needed so that he could believe.

- If you were to ask me why I believe, this is one of the portions of Scripture I would cite. It is a solid foundation for my faith.

³⁰ *Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.*

³¹ *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Jesus' earthly work was fulfilled after his followers had a steadfast faith.

- Christ's atoning death for our sins on the cross and his resurrection from the dead are worthless to each of us, unless we put our faith in Jesus as our Savior. Then we have forgiveness of all our sins, and eternal life.

Have you put your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior?

Easter must be much more than an annual religious tradition. We miss the point entirely if we think, '*That's all there is to it*' and then go back to our routines.

- After his resurrection Jesus came back to his disciples to say, '*That's not all there is. You must believe.*'

That's one of the chief reasons why I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior.

II. THE COMFORTING ASSURANCE OF HIS FORGIVENESS. John 20:20-23

After Jesus appeared to the disciples, they were "pumped."

²⁰ *The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

But that was just the beginning of a new life for all of them.

²¹ *Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*

On several occasions Jesus had explained why he came into the world—why the Father had sent him. He said, '*I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*' (Luke 5:32), '*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost,*' (Luke 19:10), and '*the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*' (Matthew 20:28)

Now Jesus said to his disciples, '*I'm giving you the same assignment. I am sending you into the world not to be served but to serve, to seek and save spiritually lost people, and to call sinners to repentance.*'

- If Jesus was sending his disciples just as he had been sent, they would need divine power.

Jesus gave it to them.

²² *And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.*

²³ *If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

They would be sent with the same power Christ had—the power of the Holy Spirit.

According to Luke's Gospel, on this occasion Jesus also said to his disciples, '*This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*' (Luke 24:46, 47)

That explains verse 23. Jesus' disciples would have the authority to assure people that their sins were forgiven if they placed their trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Were it not for Christ's death and resurrection, mankind would be helpless and hopeless.

- It doesn't take a strong argument to convince people that evil has caused devastating harm to the human race.

The destructive work of evil has devastated the human race.

God sent his sinless son into the world to pay the penalty for our sins on the cross. There Jesus defeated the power of sin and arose from the dead.

This is why all who confess their sins to God and believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior are forgiven of all their sins and freed from the power of evil.

This is not religious fantasy. This is what the resurrection of Jesus Christ means to us.

This is why I believe.

Jesus' work on earth was not done until his disciples believed.

People need to hear the good news about Jesus so that they too can believe and be saved.

Have you believed? Or have you been a doubter, like Thomas?

Are you ready to confess sincerely to Jesus, as Thomas did, *'My Lord and my God'*?

Let Easter mean more to you than just a religious holiday.

I invite you to pray, confessing your sins to God and placing your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior.