

Why Believe in Jesus?

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Date: 07 April 2024

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[0 : 00] Thanks very much, Neil. Good morning, everyone. Really good to have you with us, whether in the church here or remotely. A question. Why do you believe in Jesus?

Or maybe for some people the question is, why do you not believe in Jesus? Or more generally, why do people believe in Jesus or not believe in Jesus?

I think these are really important questions. If we are a Christian, we say we are a Christian, we should know what is the basis for our faith. If we say, well, I don't believe, then why do we not believe?

And if we're thinking of telling others about Jesus and the good news of the gospel, what is it that brings them to believe? Or what is it that keeps them back from believing?

These are questions, I think, which come from the passage today and more generally from John's gospel. So in our passage, we have the first appearance of the Lord Jesus to his disciples, and there's a question of belief there.

[1 : 04] But more particularly, when we come to Thomas and the Lord's appearance to Thomas, there's the question, what is it that led Thomas to believe? And then as the Lord says, how blessed are those who haven't seen and yet have believed?

The question then is, well, why do people believe having not seen? Why should we believe if we haven't seen? And then at the end, we have the verse we refer to quite a few times as we've gone through John's gospel, John's purpose statement, that he's made a careful selection from all the things that happened during Jesus' life.

And he's done it so that he can bring them together and help us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And so I think as we come to the end of John's gospel, this is a good thing to be thinking about.

Now, I say the end of John's gospel, there is another chapter to go, which Archie will be taking us through next week, a very important chapter. But that has the nature probably of an epilogue to John's gospel.

If chapter 21 wasn't there and John's gospel ended at chapter 20, it wouldn't seem unfinished. And I think John wrote chapter 21, at least in part to tie up the loose end with Peter.

[2 : 20] Last time we saw Peter, he was denying he knew the Lord Jesus. And that invites the question, well, what happens next? And chapter 21 gives us the answer to that. But chapter 20 is in many ways the ending of the main section of John's gospel.

So it's a good time, I think, to look back and think what is John being saying to us throughout his gospel. So this morning, I want to do things a little bit differently from how I normally do.

We're not going to spend all our time going through the passage. We'll talk about it fairly briefly and try and get an understanding of it. And then I want to focus very particularly on this question, why believe in Jesus?

What is it that John says in the passage we're looking at today and throughout his gospel that should compel us to believe in Jesus? And we'll let John speak for himself largely.

We'll pick verses from the gospel that will help us to understand what he's saying. But let's begin with this passage. It's a great passage in its own right, isn't it?

[3 : 22] So we're picking up the story of Jesus on Easter Sunday. So previously during the day in the morning, the Lord Jesus has risen from the dead.

He's appeared to Mary Magdalene. We know from other gospels he appeared to other women as well. Peter and John have been to the tomb and witnessed the fact that Jesus is no longer there. And now we're in the evening and the disciples are together, almost all of them, in a room with the doors locked.

But they were afraid. They had seen what has happened to Jesus. And even though they had heard that Jesus had risen from the woman, still they were worried, what is going to happen to us?

And they were sitting, no doubt, in that locked room and almost waiting in fear of the knock on the door. And someone has come to them to say, Look, you're next.

We're going to put you on trial. And as the disciples are there, suddenly Jesus appears with them. Now, isn't a common thing in the gospel that Jesus suddenly appears out of nowhere?

[4 : 32] So it may be that with his resurrection body, things were a bit different. But despite the locked doors, Jesus himself came and stood there and he talked to them.

And what Jesus said to them was designed to reassure them and to prepare them for the future. He starts by saying, Peace be with you.

A peace they certainly didn't have. They were probably feeling guilty about the fact that they deserted Jesus in his hour of need. As I've said, they were worried. Jesus comes first and says, Peace be with you.

He then demonstrates very clearly that it is him. They see his hands and his side where the nails had been, where the spear had gone. And they are overjoyed, says John.

It really is Jesus. He really is alive. And then Jesus repeats a bit of a summary of what he talked to them about in chapters 13 through to 16, his upper room ministry.

[5 : 34] He sends them out. He gives them their commission to go and to tell others about him. He does something which symbolizes the coming of the Holy Spirit.

He breathes on them and says that they will receive the Holy Spirit. Again, something promised in the earlier chapters. And then he promises that if they say people's sins are forgiven, then these people will be forgiven and conversely not.

Now, I don't think the Lord Jesus is saying here, you can just go up to people and say your sins are forgiven. The sense, I believe, is that if people have demonstrated evidence of faith, the disciples can give them the assurance that their sins are forgiven because they believed in Jesus.

Or conversely, if they haven't shown faith in Jesus, to say, no, your sins are not forgiven. Anyway, what this event does, what this appearing of the Lord Jesus does for most of the disciples, it gives them a real reassurance.

Jesus is alive. All our worries and fears we can put behind us and we can go out and tell others about him. We then move on a week, so I guess in terms of our timetable, we're on today, the Sunday after Easter.

[6 : 53] And we have the disciples again together, but this time Thomas is with them. I like Thomas. Thomas, it seems to me, was someone who was very straightforward.

He said what he thought and he wasn't afraid to say it, even if it wasn't what other people might want to hear. So back in chapter 11, we have the incident where Lazarus has died and Jesus says, we'll go and Jesus would raise him from the dead.

And the disciples are saying, well, we can't go to Jerusalem because Jesus is going to be arrested. We're all going to be in danger. And Thomas says, well, let's just go with them and we can die with them.

A man of some courage. Chapter 14, Jesus is talking to his disciples about what will happen when he goes to the father. He's gone to prepare a place for them, he says.

And he says, you know the way to the place where I'm going. And it's one of these situations, you think, where the disciples are looking around and thinking, we don't really know. We don't really understand what's going on.

[7 : 57] But it's almost everyone's afraid to say anything except Thomas. So Thomas says, Lord, we don't know where you're going, so how can we possibly know the way? And then Jesus says, of course, I am the way, the truth and the life.

Someone who is willing to say what he thought. And so he gets again here. Thomas is hearing the accounts of disciples and he's thinking they're hallucinating.

This is wishful thinking that Jesus has come and has appeared to them. And so he says, unless I see the nail marks, unless I put my finger in the nail marks, I put my hand in his side, I'm not going to believe.

And then they're together a week later. Jesus comes again, very similar to the last time, suddenly appears among them, says, peace be with you. And he says to Thomas, look, put your finger here.

Put your hand here. Stop doubting and believe. And Thomas doesn't need to do it. Seeing Jesus, hearing Jesus is enough. And we have this great statement of faith, in many ways a climax of the gospel, as Thomas says, my Lord and my God.

[9 : 09] And then we have Jesus' response to him, because you've seen, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Thomas himself would have become one of the great witnesses, I think, to the Lord Jesus.

Someone who could say, I didn't believe, and then I got the evidence, and I believed in Jesus. Okay, so that hopefully gives us some understanding of the passage.

We will be referring to it again as we go along. But let's now take this question. Why believe in Jesus? I'm going to suggest five things that John says that are reasons why we believe in Jesus. And the first of these is credible witnesses. In many ways, John is a book of witnesses. John himself is a witness. But there are also lots of other people, as you go through John's gospel, who can say, I've met Jesus.

I believed in him. Here is what he's done for me. Here's why you should believe as well. I suspect most of us first heard about Jesus from someone else.

[10 : 19] Someone who believed in Jesus told us about him and said, here is someone who's worth believing in. For quite a number of us, it would have been our parents. When we were children, teaching us the stories of Jesus, and in many cases, living out the Christian life.

Now, we're not all people who grow up in a home where Christian faith is possessed, professed, have happy memories of it. But for many of us, we can look to our parents and say, yes, they were a great example to us.

Or perhaps there was a friend who talked to you about Jesus. But someone said, I believe in Jesus, and you saw the genuineness of their faith, and you too felt that you should explore this further.

And we have that here. We have the witness of the disciples. We have, as I said later, the witness of Thomas and the witness of John in the gospel. But let me just present you three witnesses that John brings to us through the gospel.

First of these is John the Baptist. John the Baptist was the forerunner of the Lord Jesus. He was the one who came and said, there's someone coming after me who's much greater than me. I'm not even worthy of untying his shoelaces.

[11 : 31] And John said quite a number of things. One of the things he said was, I have seen and I have testified. I testify that this is God's chosen one.

In the same passage, he says, Luke, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. So in terms of John's gospel, the first witness to Jesus was John the Baptist.

Jumped on a few chapters to chapter 4. In chapter 4, Jesus meets with a Samaritan woman at a well. And he has a discussion with her, which is about living water.

Also about her personal circumstances. She had five husbands. She's living with someone who's not her husband. And she goes away and she tells everyone in that village, come see a man that told me everything I ever did.

He was a great witness. Someone who had met Jesus. Someone who he had been able to talk to and to convince of the genuineness of who he was.

[12 : 37] And she goes back and she invites lots of others to come with her. Then the third witness I'd suggest is a man who was born blind.

John chapter 9, a man who was born blind, who Jesus sends down to the pool of Siloam. And as he washes the mud off, he can see again. And the man, throughout the chapter, all he can say is, look, you may not believe in Jesus, but one thing I know, I used to be blind.

Now I can see. And I believe in Jesus because of that. Credible witnesses, people who've encountered Jesus, who've experienced what he had to offer them, and who have come to believe in him.

One other thing about these witnesses, what was the reaction to them? Well, John the Baptist, some of his disciples immediately left him and went and followed Jesus, Andrew and possibly John, along with them.

John had been preparing them for the Lord Jesus coming, and they believed the testimony of John, and they immediately went and followed Jesus. Samaritan woman.

[13 : 52] She goes back, she tells the people in her village, they come and they meet Jesus, and they say to her, well, we kind of believe because you told us, but now that we've met him, we really

believe that he's the Messiah who has come into the world.

So someone who's heard, who's been attracted to Jesus through the witness of others, but who come and to see for themselves and experience for themselves what Jesus is like.

Then in chapter 9, we have almost the opposite. We have this blind man who's going around telling people about what Jesus has done for him, and they're not willing to listen.

The man ultimately is thrown out of the temple, and the resolve of the Jewish leaders against Jesus is hardened. And of course, over the following chapters, we see the continuing rejection, and eventually his trial and his crucifixion.

I think we will, if we are talking to people about Jesus, we will also get these kind of reactions. Some people will recognize the faith and the difference it makes to us, and because of that, they will be attracted to Jesus.

[15:03] Now, it needs to be in their own faith that they come to understand and to believe, but the witness of people who live out their faith can be really important in people coming to Jesus.

Some people may be made curious by what we say to them. They may want to say, well, I want to find out a bit more for myself about Jesus. And there will be some, sadly, who will just reject and say, no, I'm not interested.

I don't want to believe in Jesus. The important thing for us, if we are Christians, if we are followers of Jesus, is that we are credible witnesses, that we live out our faith, and that we share it with others.

Second thing I would suggest that John brings before us is compelling evidence. And throughout the Gospel, he is trying to present what Jesus did and what he said, and to say to us, this is evidence that Jesus really is the Messiah.

He really is the Son of God. So throughout the Gospel, there are a number of what John calls signs. We would call them miracles. There are seven before the death of the Lord Jesus.

[16:16] There's one still to come in chapter 21. And of course, there's the resurrection of Jesus, the greatest miracle of all. But these signs demonstrate, says John, the power and authority of the Lord Jesus.

Power over nature, turning water into wine, feeding 5,000 with five loaves and two fishes, walking on the water. Power over illness, healing an official servant from a distance.

The lame man in John chapter 5, who is healed by Jesus, and the blind man we've already talked about. And then power over death, the raising of Lazarus, and ultimately the resurrection of the Lord Jesus himself.

And John says to us, these are things you should consider. Here's the evidence. It's pretty compelling. Believe in Jesus. And Jesus himself says something similar.

In John chapter 10, he says, Even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand the Father is in me, and I in the Father.

[17:26] Believe the works. The words of Jesus in many ways should be enough for people to believe. But he says, if that's not enough, then look at what I've done and believe because of that.

There is compelling evidence. What's the compelling evidence for us? We can't, we haven't seen the miracles of Jesus that he did when we were on earth.

We can't go and talk to people who could say, yes, Jesus healed me. I was blind. He made me see. We can't do that because we're 2,000 years on. And yet Jesus says people will believe in him.

John says, I've written these things so that you will believe. I believe the evidence for Jesus is still compelling. There are many books written that would help us to understand the reasons why Jesus is who he said he was.

Particularly, there are books written about his resurrection and attesting to that. There's one on the front porch, if you want to, as you go out today, a book about, is Easter credible?

[18:37] But if we will honestly examine the facts about Jesus, I think particularly if we will read in John's gospel and the other gospels and see the life of Jesus, there is, even in that, compelling evidence of who Jesus is.

He doesn't leave us the option of saying, oh, he's just a good man. He was a fine teacher, anything like that. Jesus is presented as God's son, and the evidence is there for us to see and to believe.

And if you want to read the books on apologetics explaining why people have come to believe in Jesus, many people who didn't believe have written books saying how they came to believe in Jesus, that could be helpful too.

But the gospels speak for themselves. There is compelling evidence that Jesus is who he said he was. He is God's son, and therefore we should believe in him.

Incredible witnesses, compelling evidence. And my third heading is Christ recognized. That's what happens in this passage, isn't it? When Jesus appears first to the probably ten disciples in the upper room on the evening of his resurrection, and then when he appears with Thomas there, they only have to look at him and to hear his voice, and they recognize who he was, and they rejoice, and they worship him.

[20 : 02] Thomas' doubts vanish immediately. He doesn't need to do the physical action. He recognizes Jesus, and he says, My Lord and my God, I believe in you.

I recognize who you are, and I recognize that what you said about yourself, it has all come true. You are the Christ. You are the Son of God.

And again, as we go through John's gospel, we see people recognizing Jesus. John himself, John the writer of the gospel, right at the beginning, he says, We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Here's someone who'd been with Jesus for a long time, known him at least three years during his earthly ministry in this world, and he says, We saw him, and we saw that he was God.

He was the one who had come from the Father, and who displayed to us the glory of God. We recognized Jesus when he was with us.

[21 : 11] Then there's Peter. John chapter 6 is the story of the feeding of the 5,000, and then Jesus walks on the water. And then there's some pretty hard teaching of Jesus, talking about the bread of life and what that means, but also challenging people, those who would have made him king earlier, but actually who were very shallow in their belief in him.

And they depart, they leave him, and Jesus says to his disciples, What about you? Are you going to go as well? And Peter says, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God. We have come to believe and to know. We have recognized you, Jesus, for who you are, the Son of God, here with us in the world.

How important it is that we come to recognize who Jesus is. Christian faith is not simply a matter of saying, Yes, I believe Jesus lived 2,000 years ago.

I believe he died on the cross, that he was a good man, and that's it. He's an example, but not much more. Christian faith is about a relationship with Jesus.

[22 : 25] It is about recognizing that he is not just a man, not just a good man who lived many years ago. He is God come to live among us, to live our life, to suffer everything that we do, but without doing anything wrong, and ultimately to die on the cross for us.

And it's when we come to recognize who Jesus is, and when we come into a living relationship with him, that we can truly say, I believe in Jesus.

I believe he's the Son of God. I believe he's my Savior and my Lord. We need to recognize Jesus. Two more thoughts to go.

Credible witnesses, compelling evidence, Christ recognized, and a clear challenge. You notice in the incident with Thomas, the Lord Jesus says to him, stop doubting and believe.

And as we go through the Gospel of John, again and again and again, we get challenges given to us. A couple of these, look at John chapter 8, the Lord Jesus is in a big debate with the Jews, and he says to them, if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.

[23 : 47] The Jews were saying that Jesus was from the devil, that he wasn't from God. Jesus said, if you don't believe who I am, then you'll die in your sins. Perhaps even clearer and more challenging than that, John chapter 3.

John 3, of course, is the story of Nicodemus, and there's a story about John the Baptist. And right at the end, it's not clear whether it's John the Baptist's words or John the Gospel writer's words, it doesn't matter.

It says, whoever believed in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.

And Jesus and John the Gospel writer very clearly want to present to us the challenge. Either you believe and you live, or you don't believe, and you're in your sins, and ultimately you will be judged for that.

It's important today, too, that we are willing to say that to others, and that we challenge ourselves with it if we've not yet come to believe in Jesus.

[24 : 53] There is a binary choice. Either we believe in Jesus, and our sins are forgiven, or we don't believe in Jesus, and ultimately we'll face God's judgment on us.

One or the other will apply to each of us. And we need to examine ourselves and see, do I believe, do I have that assurance that my sins are forgiven?

And if not, we need to come to the Lord Jesus, confess our sins, believe in him, and be forgiven. A clear challenge that is presented to us.

And then finally, credible witnesses, compelling evidence, Christ recognized, a clear challenge, and there is the call of God. If we believe in Jesus, if we have believed in Jesus, it is because God has spoken to us and has drawn us to himself.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, convicting us of sin and helping us to believe that Jesus, who he says he is, and coming to faith in him.

[26 : 03] The words of Jesus from John chapter 6 again, no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them.

And that's not an excuse that someone could say, well, God hasn't drawn me to him, therefore I'm not going to believe. God calls us to believe, and if we believe, then we will receive forgiveness. But nevertheless, unless God works in our hearts, unless we're receptive to God working in our hearts, we won't believe, because it is those who God draws to himself, to faith in the Lord Jesus, who will trust in him.

I think that gives us reason if we're Christians and we want others to come to Jesus. That gives us reason to be on our knees in prayer for those who don't yet know the Savior, that he will work in their hearts, that he will draw them to himself, that they will come to trust in Jesus.

I'm sure there are many other reasons you can maybe think of about why we should believe in Jesus, but I leave these five with you. Credible witnesses, compelling evidence, Christ recognized, a clear challenge, and the call of God.

[27 : 15] We then have the question, do you believe in Jesus? Have you come to that point of trusting in him, of recognizing that you need him for your eternal salvation, and of putting your faith in him?

And if you have, are you reaching out to others and helping them on that journey that the Lord would take them on to faith in Jesus? To a journey that Thomas went on, to a journey that all the disciples went on, from the law of Jesus' death and thinking everything we stood for has gone, to recognizing Jesus was alive, that what he said had come to pass, and then going out and turning the world upside down with their message.

Let me finish with a quote from C.S. Lewis. C.S. Lewis is one of the great Christian apologists in part because for a long time he didn't believe, he didn't think Christian faith was credible, and then through the witness of J.R.R.R. Tolkien and others, he came to understand Christian faith and to trust in Jesus.

And C.S. Lewis said this, Christianity, if false, is of no importance. And if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.

What I would urge you to do this morning, don't go away from here thinking, yes, this Christianity is a good thing. There are nice people here. We've had a good time. And I believe that Jesus was someone very special.

[28 : 51] That's not enough. Christianity demands either that we reject Jesus and take the consequences of that, or that we accept him, that we believe in him, and he becomes the most important thing, the most important person in our lives.

If the message of the gospel, if Christianity is true, if Christ truly is God, that is of infinite importance, and that should be something that directs our thoughts and our actions every day of our lives.

So why do you believe in Jesus? Why do you not believe in Jesus? If you don't believe in Jesus, can I urge you, go and read John's gospel for yourself.

See the evidence that John presents. Come with an open mind, looking for the truth. And I believe if you do that, you will see that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, that you will believe in him.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word this morning. Thank you for Thomas. Thank you for the way in which the Lord Jesus helped him to believe and to understand, and for that great statement of faith, my Lord and my God.

[30 : 07] We pray that you help all of us to come to that point, where we recognize Jesus as the one who is God with us, and the one who we should be obeying as our Lord and our Saviour.

Thank you for the privilege it has been this morning to meet together, to worship, and to consider your word. We pray that you will continue to be with us, as many of us now will join together in remembering the Lord Jesus in the way he's commanded.

We give you our thanks and ask for your blessing. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.