

## **Conclusive Evidence of Christ's Resurrection**

Scripture: John 20:19–29

Code: 43-113

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, the literal physical bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead is so critical to the Christian gospel that all four gospel writers – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – give us an account of the resurrection and provide for us multiple evidences of its reality. The resurrection is a historical fact, as the Lord Jesus was a historical person, died an actual historical death, rose from the dead in real history and in physical form, though a glorified physical form. This is so critical to Christianity that the evidences are piled up by the gospel writers, and then even enhanced by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians, chapter 15.

As you come to the book of Acts which describes the apostles proclaiming the gospel, you find that they preached the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection is absolutely critical to Christianity. It means that God was satisfied with the sacrifice for sin that Christ offered. It means that He conquered death, not only for Himself, but for all of us who put our faith in Him. In His resurrection is our resurrection, as in His cross is our forgiveness.

The resurrection was presented by the writers of the Old Testament in a number of ways. Our Lord Jesus Himself spoke of His resurrection to His apostles. But in spite of what the Scripture said, in spite of what our Lord said to them on surely many, many occasions, and specifically that He would die and He would rise again on the third day, in spite of that His followers did not believe He would rise. In fact, they were stubbornly resistant to the testimony that He was alive; and yet when He appeared to them, all doubt was dispelled, and they went forth confident that Christ was alive from the dead, preaching a risen Christ and preaching resurrection.

Before they saw Him, however, the disciples were trapped in fear and doubt. They were anything but bold. We find them in the 20th chapter of John and the text that we come to this morning locked in a room with the door barred for fear that they were going to be arrested with the possibility of execution, the same that had happened to the Master. They are fearful, they are frightened, terrified of the consequences that could fall on them. The last thing they expect is a resurrection. They don't believe in a resurrection. They don't even believe the testimony of eyewitnesses who were credible and known to them.

Why is it then that they preached the resurrection all the way to the death? Why is it that they preached the risen Christ against hatred, opposition, and eventually gave their lives as martyrs for the gospel of the resurrection? Anyone who denies the resurrection would have to come up with some other supernatural, inexplicable, massive event that transformed them from frightened, coward, disappointed disciples into bold, relentless, fearless preachers of Jesus Christ. If it wasn't a resurrection what was it? No other possible miracle has ever been suggested, especially when we recognize that they preached the resurrection. There had to be an event that transformed them. They say the event that transformed them was the resurrection, and they preached that, which is testimony to its reality. John was exiled on the Isle of Patmos, the rest of them were martyred for preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But at the time we meet them in our text this morning in John, chapter 20, they are still devastated, verse 19: “When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.’”

“But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.’”

“After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said again, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.’” This is the appearance of the Lord to the disciples. Judas is gone, eleven remain. The first appearance was only to ten, because Thomas the straggler was not there.

What had happened already on the day of resurrection? Go back to Luke 24 just so we get the full picture. Our Lord comes out of the grave early in the morning at dawn, and Luke records for us that the women arrive at the tomb. They find the tomb is empty, the stone is rolled away, the grave clothes are lying there. They are perplexed, verse 4 of Luke 24. “Two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing.” We know these are angels. “And as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the angel said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’ And they remembered His words, and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest of the disciples. Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles.”

All credible witnesses, well-known figures, followers of Jesus, indeed, were these women. But to the apostles, “These words” – verse 11 – “appeared as nonsense, and they would not believe them.” So averse were they to the idea of a resurrection that they wouldn’t believe the most credible people in their circle of human relationships.

“Peter” – always spontaneous – “got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, saw the linen wrappings only, went away to his home wondering what had happened.” Again, not sure whether he actually believed in a resurrection. We know, however, from later in this chapter, and we know also from 1 Corinthians 15 that the Lord made an appearance to Peter, a personal appearance to Peter, to convince him as the leader.

So the women have gone to the grave, the tomb is empty, the grave clothes are lying there. There's no explanation. The women are told by two angels He has risen. These who give the testimony are messengers from heaven. This is God's word on what happened to the Lord Jesus. The women believe, they rush to the eleven apostles, and they are met with the idea that they are speaking nonsense. In the meantime, of course, we know the Lord appeared personally to Mary Magdalene.

A little later that day we pick up the story in verse 13 of Luke 24. Two disciples, not apostles, but two of the followers of Jesus were on their way seven miles to the town of Emmaus. They were talking to each other, walking and talking. In verse 15, "Jesus Himself approached them" – this is the risen Christ – "began traveling with them. Their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him."

That's always the case after the resurrection until He identifies Himself. He is in a physical form, but it is a transcendent form. It is a kind of physicality that is capable of dwelling forever in heaven. It is a physical body fit for another dimension, another realm, so they don't immediately recognize him. Their eyes are prevented from recognizing Him.

So they walk and talk with him. Eventually, as you know, they say how sad they are, because the one they had hoped would be the Messiah is dead. And, finally, our Lord explains to them that this is what the Old Testament promised. "O foolish men" – verse 25 – "slow of heart to believe in all the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things to be the sin-bearer, and then rise and enter into His glory?" Beginning at Moses with all the prophets, he explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. He gave them a messianic interpretation of the Old Testament which applied to Him. They still don't know who He is.

"He approached the village with them. He acted as if He was going to go further. They urged Him" – in verse 29 – 'Stay with us, it's getting toward evening; the day is now nearly over.' So He went in to stay with them. When He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight."

So now the women have seen Him, that is at least Mary Magdalene. The women have heard from the angels. Perhaps Peter has seen Him. Two on the road to Emmaus have seen Him. These two have burning hearts, verse 32: "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, and while He was explaining the Scriptures to us." They not only were burning in their hearts because they were with Him, but because now the whole Old Testament made sense.

"They got up that very hour" – verse 33 – "returned to Jerusalem, found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, saying, 'The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon.'" Somehow they got that word. "And they began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread."

Simon was there. Must have himself tried to explain that he had seen the risen Christ. This would give validity to the testimony of the women and the eyewitness account of Mary Magdalene. And now these two have rushed there in the evening of the resurrection day itself to declare that they have spent time with the Lord. And as they rush in to declare their experience of seeing the risen Christ they are met with the same kind of questioning.

But while they are there giving their testimony, Luke 24 – look at the next verse, verse 36: “While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be to you.’ But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit or a ghost. And He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit doesn’t have flesh and bones as you see that I have.’ And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave Him a piece of broiled fish. He took it and ate it before them.” That’s His arrival.

Now let’s go to John 20 and pick up the same exact scene. He has appeared to Mary, the angels have declared His resurrection to the other women, He has appeared to Simon, He has appeared to the disciples on the road; now it is time to appear to the eleven, verse 19 of John 20: “When it was evening” – picking right up where we left off in Luke – “on that day, the first day of the week,” – resurrection day – “and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews.” Just to let you know, they were afraid that they also could be arrested and led to the same fate that had befallen the Lord.

When it says the door is shut, the Greek word is actually barred or locked. We would say that they were padlocked inside. And the reason was, they were afraid of the temple police that acted on behalf of the Jews. They were the force that arrested criminals. They knew that since their Master had been executed as a criminal they could be next because of their association with Him. They are in fear, they are terrified; they are locked up in this room.

In that situation the text simply says, “Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’” How did that happen? Well, He rearranged the molecules in His resurrected body to go right through the wall the same way He had rearranged the molecules in His resurrected body in the grave to go right through the linen clothing, the linen wrapping.

Now I know what the skeptics say. They say, “No, that’s not true. He met a janitor who had a secret key and let Him in.” Somebody else suggested, “No, He found an open window and crawled through the window.” Somebody else said, “No, the truth of the matter is He was in the room before they got there and locked the door.” All ridiculous efforts to discount the resurrection.

The fact is they were locked up in a room and Jesus immediately stood in the middle of the room. He didn’t say, “Shame on you for your doubt.” He said, “Peace be with you.” That would be the right thing to say, because the trauma must have been literally shocking. If those on the road to Emmaus were traumatized by His presence, imagine how these men were traumatized, and also other disciples who were there when He stood in the midst of a room that was barred and locked.

He is not a spirit though, He is not a phantom. You might think that if He could move through walls. But to make sure you don’t think that verse 20 says, “When He had said this, ‘Peace be with you,’ He showed them both His hands and His side” – as Luke records. He is not a phantom; He is not a spirit; He’s not an apparition. This is not a hallucination. This is an actual physical bodily resurrection. And to demonstrate that He shows them His scars, and as we read in Luke 24, verses 42 and 43, He ate broiled fish. This is really Jesus in bodily form, a glorified body, a resurrected body, but a body nonetheless.

In heaven in the scene in Revelation, chapter 5, where you see the throne of God and the cry is, “Who is going to take back the earth from the usurper Satan? Who is worthy to come and destroy Satan and all the demons and all the ungodly, and take back the world? Who has the title deed and the power?” And no one comes. And John starts to weep because there’s no one to do that.

And, finally, someone appears and it’s none other than the Son of God, but He appears as a Lamb, as though it had been slain, a scarred sacrifice. Even in heaven He will bear those scars. Even in heaven He will be one who has evidence of having been slain. And, of course, the end of verse 20: “The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.” It’s all clear now; they rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

I can’t even begin to describe what that may have been like, what that conversation was like, what that joy was like. It’s pretty understated; they rejoiced. That’s a pretty understated way to describe those men reacting to the fact that they believed Jesus was dead and He shows up alive coming through the wall. Incredible joy, trying to sort it all out, undoing all the *móros*, doubts that they had cultivated in the hours since His death, and substituting in their place indescribable joy. They rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

“So” – verse 21 – “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you.’” He calms them down again. The first time He calms them down because they were traumatized, now He calms them down because they’re exploding, they’re erupting in joy. “Peace be with you. Calm down. I know this is an exhilarating moment like none that ever any human could experience, but calm down.” “Why? Why?” “I have something to say to you.”

Calming them down seemed to be pretty much routine. He said in verse 19, He said it in verse 21, and eight days later He says it again in verse 26, as we shall see, “Peace be with you.” It is a greet, it is *shalom*, but it’s more than that. Even eight days later they’re still shaken by these circumstances, and they haven’t seen Him for eight days, as we’ll note. They still don’t know where this is all going. It’s all having a very difficult time registering in their minds. But our Lord has something to say to him, and what He says is profound and simple.

We often talk about the fact that what someone says before they die is important. Usually people don’t trivialize at the moment of their death. What people say in their last breath is something that’s dominating their thoughts and dominating their hearts.

But think about this: What is the first thing Jesus said to His disciples after He rose from the dead? How critical is that? He has one simple message. It is so simple, it is so straightforward that it just occupies three little verses, and yet it is a profound sermon: “Stop all the rejoicing. Stop being traumatized now. Stop rejoicing, calm down and listen.” This is His first post-resurrection sermon, and it’s a mandate. Essentially, it is the first articulation of the Great Commission.

Later on when He ascended into heaven He reiterated that Great Commission as recorded in Matthew, chapter 28, verses 18-20. He talks about the Great Commission at the end of Luke as well. But here is the first declaration of the Great Commission. It touches all of us, because we are in the flow of fulfilling that commission.

Now we all know the Matthew account: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the

name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I've commanded you; and lo, I am with you always." That's the Great Commission: go to the world, take the gospel, baptize believers, and then edify them in the truth of Scripture. We all know that.

But here is the initial revelation of the Great Commission. It has three parts. Number One, verse 21: "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." This is the first phase, the first element, the first feature of the Lord's commission: "I am sending you into the world as the Father has sent Me." It's just a simple but profound statement.

Why did the Father send Jesus into the world? He didn't send Jesus into the world to bring about social justice. He didn't send Jesus into the world to improve people's economic condition. He didn't send Jesus into the world to elevate our understanding of godly morality. He didn't send His Son into the world to make people's circumstances better. He didn't send Him into the world to raise the economic standards. "The Son of Man is come" – He said – "to seek and to" – what? – "save the lost."

That's why He came. He had no other purpose; His purpose was salvation. The Father sent the Son to seek and save the lost, to provide the sacrifice necessary in His death, and the triumph necessary in His resurrection, to bring salvation to all God's chosen people through all of redemptive history. I don't know if you think about your life this way, but you should.

"As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. The Father sent Me for gospel evangelistic purpose, I send you for the very same." That's why you're here. You're not here for anything less than that. You're here for the purpose of fulfilling the very task that was originally given to Christ.

When Luke begins the book of Acts he says, "The ministry that Jesus began was now carried on by the apostles," and it's continuing to be carried on by us. He said, "I have not come to call the righteous to repentance, but sinners. I sent My Son into the world to save sinners," says the Father. And the Son says, "And now I send you to do the same."

Back in chapter 17, the night before, in His great high priestly prayer, our Lord says the same thing, chapter 17, verse 18: "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And in order for them to be effective, you have to sanctify them" – verse 17 – "in the truth; Your word is truth. I send them as a people sanctified in the truth to do the very thing that You sent Me to do."

Jesus didn't assault any human institution. He didn't come for educational purposes; He didn't come for philanthropic purposes; He never engaged in any effort to remedy social issues. He came into the world to seek and save lost sinners, and bring them salvation, and that is why all believers exist in the world today. Everything we do, whether it's our ministry, our worship, our study of Scripture; whether it's our spiritual testimony as we shine as lights in the world, has as its objective to put on display a transformed life, transformed by God through the gospel so that the gospel has credibility when we proclaim its truth.

If you say Christ changed your life, you'd better have a changed life. If you have a changed life, somebody says, "You're very different and it's very obvious. Why?" and you explain, "It's Jesus Christ," then that makes the gospel credible. Everything we do in our lives, everything we do in our lives is to let our light shine so that men can see the good works, glorify God who is in heaven who

transformed us to such good works, and then take that as an opportunity, shining His lights in the world to preach the gospel of light.

We forget this. One writer said, “Christians are like a whole lot of people with colds; they’re all sneezing at each other, but nobody gets it because everybody’s got it.” We’ve got to find the people who haven’t got it, that’s our mission field.

What’s your plan? What’s your strategy? Where are you going with your commission? That’s why you’re here. Yes, you’re here to worship, because worship is part of your witness. Worship is part of your spiritual maturing process, part of your sanctification. Yes, you’re here to learn the truth. Yes, you’re here to serve. Yes, you’re here to love. All of that is manifest evidence of a transformation that makes the gospel believable.

But what’s your gospel plan? What’s your gospel strategy? We are the continuing believers who carry into this generation the very same commission. The Lord sends us the same way the Father sent Him; and it also entails some sacrifice and rejection, along with acceptance and usefulness. That’s the first thing.

Second thing in this short sermon – first thing is, “I’m sending you the same way the Father sent Me.” The second aspect is, verse 22: “When He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” Absolutely critical. This is a great task. This is a formidable task.

When Christ came into the world the Father sent Christ. Do you remember this? When the Father sent Christ into the world and He began His ministry, the Holy Spirit came upon Him at His baptism and launched Him into His ministry. He actually said, “When you reject Me you blaspheme the Holy Spirit,” because in His incarnation, in His self-emptying, He submitted Himself to the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. As the Father sent Jesus into the world, Jesus sends us. As the Father empowered Jesus with the Holy Spirit, Jesus empowers us with the Holy Spirit. He is our Spirit-filled model.

Throughout the evening before, in John 14, 15, and 16, He kept saying to the disciples, “When I go, I will send the Spirit. When I go, I will come back in the form of the Holy Spirit. It is better for you that I go, because then the Spirit will come, and He will lead you into all truth, and He will teach you all things concerning Me.”

In Acts, chapter 1 and verse 8, He says, “When the Spirit comes on you, you’ll receive power, and you’ll be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. You can’t do this without the Holy Spirit.” But the way in which He says this is so interesting: “He breathed on them.” That’s a powerful gesture. That’s a creative gesture.

If you go back into Genesis, chapter 2, you remember that when God had created Adam it says, “He breathed into him the breath of life, and Adam became a living soul.” That’s the expression of God’s creative power.

In that famous valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37, which is a picture of the future corpse of Israel lying like dry bones in the desert, you remember God shows up and says to the prophet, “Breathe on them.” And the breath of God comes and all the dry bones come alive, and that is the future salvation

and resurrection of the nation Israel.

And in the great new covenant passage of Ezekiel 36, we hear that God is going to cleanse us from our sins and He is going to give us a new spirit, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the breath of God. The Holy Spirit is God in us. The Holy Spirit is the source of power: "You'll receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you." Here, our Lord shows them a symbol of this, notice it: "He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" That did not happen then. That did not happen then. We know that, because of clear revelation.

Down in verse 26, they were still fearful, they were still hunkered down, they were still hiding, they were still locked up, and our Lord comes back and says, "Peace be with you." They still didn't have a constant peace like He had promised in chapter 14, verse 27: "My peace I give you. My peace I leave with you, not as the world give I, but this is the peace that comes from God." They didn't have that peace. If they had had the Holy Spirit who is love, joy, peace, they'd have had that peace.

Over in chapter 21, they still are confused up in Galilee when Jesus appears to them, and they don't yet know that it was Jesus. Their recognition factors aren't good. And, of course, He promised, "When the Spirit comes He will show you the things concerning Me."

Down in verse 12 you see they're ambivalence, chapter 21. They're right there, "Jesus talks to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples ventured to question Him saying, 'Who are You?' knowing that it was the Lord," and yet there was some ambivalence in that knowing. They're still a little confused, and the confusion is because they have not yet received the Holy Spirit. They have been promised the Holy Spirit, but they have not yet received Him.

Then, of course, in chapter 1 of Acts, He says, "When He comes you'll have power." He comes in chapter 2, the first few verses. He descends on all the believers there, including the apostles and disciples, and they are turned into fearless, bold preachers of the truth, who confront the leaders of Israel, who confront the world, and who go through the book of Acts preaching the death and resurrection of Christ: "It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us."

So the first thing our Lord post-resurrection wants us to know is you have a commission. Your commission is you're in the world for the sake of preaching the gospel. Second, "You're not in your own strength going to be able to do this, so I'm giving you the Holy Spirit."

Paul in Romans 8:9 says, "No believer is left without the Holy Spirit. He that doesn't have the Spirit is not God's." If you are God's, you have His Spirit in you. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit, we know that. So our Lord's commission then is to evangelize in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then the third element of this brief sermon is really critical, and might be a little bit remarkable at first reading, verse 23: "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." That verse has been misinterpreted and cast in stone in the Roman Catholic system. They have made it apply to the Pope, popes, and cardinals, and bishops, and priests. That, obviously, is not an accurate interpretation.

Our Lord is talking to apostles, but not just apostles. There were other people there with them as well who were followers of Christ, and He says to all of them, "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins

have been forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”

And you say, “Well, wait a minute. How can that be possible?” Mark 2:7, “Who can forgive sins but God?” Or Daniel 9:9, “To the Lord God belong compassion and forgiveness.” We can’t go around forgiving people’s sins, that’s what the priests think they can do, and they can’t do that. We can’t do that, no, not on our own authority, not on our own authority. Well you say, “Well then how does it work?” All you have to do is follow the ministry of the apostles and you’ll see it.

In the 10th chapter, for example, of the book of Acts, we have the testimony of Peter. Listen to what he said, verse 42: “God ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.” He’s talking about Christ. “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

Did you get that? Peter says, “We have been commissioned, we have been sent, we have been ordered to preach. And what are we to preach; that everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ receives forgiveness of sin. So if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, then I can say to you, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ If you reject the Lord Jesus Christ, I can say to you, ‘You’re still in your sins, your sins are retained.’”

Same thing in 13th chapter of Acts, verse 38. Here we have a similar testimony, Paul on his missionary journey: “Therefore let it be known” – verse 38 – “to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the law of Moses.”

What does that mean? All violations of God’s law, all sins. Again, you have Peter saying, “We can tell you your sins are forgiven if you believe.” Here is Paul, “We can tell you your sins are forgiven if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Just to remind you, the Great Commission in Luke 24 is this: “When you go, you preach repentance for forgiveness of sins. You proclaim that in Jesus’ name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. And I’m sending you forth in the power of the promise of My Father.” That’s the power of the Spirit, it’s all there. “I’m sending you in the power of the Spirit who was promised by My Father to preach forgiveness.”

Do I need to remind you that the gospel is the message of forgiveness. How do we lose that? We have the right to say to someone what Jesus said in John 8:24, “If you do not believe in Me, you will die in your sins, and where I go you’ll never come.”

I can say this. I can say to any soul, “Your sins are forgiven or your sins are retained based on what you do with Jesus Christ. That’s not on my authority, that’s on God’s authority; I’m just the messenger.” Anyone who is repentant and desires the forgiveness of sins by trusting in Christ receives forgiveness. I’ve said that to people many times throughout my life, countless times. I don’t have that on my own authority. I don’t have the authority to forgive anybody’s sins. But I have been called to proclaim the message of forgiveness based upon the authority of God’s word in Scripture.

This speaks to the issue of, “What is the gospel?” The gospel is not about social justice. The gospel

is not about a better life, it's not about prosperity, it's not about solving your problems, it's not about feeling good, it's not about fulfilling your dreams and ambitions; nothing to do with any of that. The gospel is about forgiveness based on repentance and faith in Christ.

So you say – I was doing a Q&A with the students at The Master's University this week and the question came up, "How do you evangelize someone?" and I said, "Well, the most direct way is to go right to the issue of forgiveness. If somebody says to you, as sometimes they will to me, 'What do you?' or, 'What do you teach?' My answer is pretty simple. I have a great job; I tell people that all their sins can be forgiven if they will repent and trust Christ. 'Are you interested?'" I mean that cuts to the issue.

It's not about a better life, it's not about a happy life. It's not about, "Are you lonely?" It's not about, "Would you like to be fulfilled?" It's not about, "Would you like somebody on your side that's bigger than you?" It's about sin and judgment and hell, and whether or not you're interested in forgiveness which is available only through Jesus Christ.

Look, I've had people turn and run, because they're not interested in forgiveness. The gospel is for people who are desperately interested in forgiveness, and that's where you go with this. The Lord came into the world not to change anybody's social strata or to make them feel better about the tough life they live in this world. He came to preach repentance and forgiveness. That's what He preached: "Repent. Repent. Be forgiven."

This is our calling: "Go to the world." Just the way the Father sent the Son, the Son sends us. "Go to the world in the power of the Spirit" – that's the power Jesus operated in – "and preach what Jesus preached: 'Believe in Me and your sins are forgiven. Reject Me and you'll die in your sins and perish.'" That's our calling.

Well, just to close out the passage, Thomas missed that sermon. Let me tell you something; it's a bad thing not to be in church. "But" – verse 24 – "Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus" – which means twin, he had a twin – "was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, 'We've seen the Lord!'"

But, again, it's so important that this account is here, because it speaks to the fact that the disciples would never have manufactured a resurrection. Not only do you have the testimony of the people on the road to Emmaus, not only do you have the testimony of Peter, not only do you have the testimony of Mary Magdalene and the women who talked to an angel; now you have the testimony of ten of the apostles, and Thomas doesn't buy it. "He said to them, 'Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, put my finger into the of the nails, put my hand into His side, I will not believe.'" That is so important, because that is saying, "I'm not going to believe unless Christ is physically bodily alive."

"After eight days" – that's the next Sunday – "His disciples are again inside, Thomas with them. The doors having been shut," – and again He comes through the walls – "say, 'Peace be with you.'" They're still struggling, probably with Thomas. "Then He said to Thomas," – I love this; talk about personal care – 'Reach here your finger,' – I think he probably took his finger, pressed it into His nail prints – 'now reach here your hand;' – he pushed it into the scar in His side – 'stop unbelieving and believe.'" That was enough for Thomas. "He said, 'My Lord and my God!'" That is the final evidence

of a literal resurrection.

The other disciples, according to Luke, as I read earlier, had already touched Him; now the straggler has his opportunity. How much does the Lord care that He gives this one doubting Thomas what he needed to believe. “Thomas said, ‘My Lord and my God! I’m convinced.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Because you’ve seen Me, you have believed,’ – rather a statement than a question – ‘Because you’ve seen Me, you’ve believed. Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.’” And that, dear friends, encompasses all of us.

First Peter, Peter says, chapter 1, “Whom having not seen, you love.” We haven’t seen the risen Christ, but we have experienced the risen Christ in His power and His presence. We love Him. Peter says, “Though you haven’t seen Him, you love Him. Though you don’t see Him now, do you believe in Him? And you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible, full of glory, receiving or obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.”

We believe unto eternal salvation. We believe in the one we haven’t seen. Why do we believe? Because we believe in the record of Scripture. Why do we believe the Bible? We believe the Bible, because the Spirit of God has given us not only faith in Christ, listen, but faith in Scripture. We weren’t argued into believing the Bible, we were led by divine power into believing the Bible. “And we walk” – says Paul in 2 Corinthians 5 – “by faith, not by sight.” I don’t need to see the risen Christ to love Him. I don’t need a vision of Him. I don’t need Him to appear to me.

Well, you say, “He appeared to Thomas.” Yeah, not because that’s the only way that we can be saved or sanctified, but because that’s the final evidence of a literal physical resurrection. It wasn’t just for Thomas, as personal as it was, it’s for all who will ever read the record. We have a risen Christ, a risen Christ whom we love and whom we believe, whom we experience in our lives on a regular basis, who has transformed us so that our lives are different. They are only explained by a supernatural miracle called the new birth, and as those who have been born anew. We have been called to a commission empowered by the Holy Spirit to confront the world with repentance and forgiveness as an escape from eternal judgment. That’s why we’re here.

Father, we thank You again for the visions that flood our hearts and minds as we contemplate these marvelous texts of Scripture, these eyewitness accounts of the risen Christ. Thank You, Lord, for giving us this revelation. Thank You for its glory, the glory of Scripture, the transcendent truthfulness of it that shines forth. We ask, Lord, that You will cause us to live our lives in a gospel way. Use us to bring others the message of repentance and forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. Father, now do Your work in every heart we pray, for Your glory. Amen.

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