

# FAITH IN CHRIST = ETERNAL LIFE

## John 20:24-31

“In one of his great sermons on the resurrection D. L. Moody tells the story of a bright young girl about fifteen years of age who was suddenly cast upon a bed of suffering, completely paralyzed on one side and nearly blind. She could hardly see, but she could hear. As she lay in bed one day she heard the family doctor say to her parents as they stood by the bedside, "She has seen her best days, poor child." Fortunately the girl was a believer, and she quickly replied, 'No, doctor, my best days are yet to come, when I shall see the King in his beauty.' Her hope, like ours, lay in the resurrection.”<sup>1</sup>

The passage at the end of John chapter 20 holds the key, so to speak, to the **Pearly Gates**. It is not Saint Peter who stands guard at the gates of Heaven as many people have been led to believe. In fact there is no gatekeeper at the gates of Heaven to ask why you should be allowed to enter. You may be surprised to learn as well that the gates of Heaven will always be wide open (Revelation 21:25) because no one will ever get that close if they have not been given free passage by Jesus Christ. According to Jesus' own Words, when you die, He will be there to accompany you to Heaven (John 14:3). You need have no fear of what lies beyond death because Jesus will be with you every step of the way. Try not to miss any of this message because it is a matter of life or death.

John 20:24-31 NAS:

<sup>24</sup> But **Thomas**, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

<sup>25</sup> 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."

<sup>26</sup> 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, "**Peace be with you.**"

<sup>27</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *An Expository Commentary – John, Volume 5: Triumph through Tragedy (John 18-21)*, Paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1568.

*unbelieving, but believing."*

<sup>28</sup> *Thomas answered and said to Him, "**My Lord and my God!**"*

<sup>29</sup> *Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed?*

***Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.**"*

<sup>30</sup> *Therefore **many other signs** Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, **which are not written in this book;***

<sup>31</sup> *but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

We do not think that we would get much of an argument from anyone if we were to say that people the world over are by nature believers in some concept of a higher power and are not hesitant to openly express those beliefs. Now you may say, "Wait a minute, I'm an atheist, I don't believe in any God!" The truth be told, you may have a deeper belief in nothing than others do in something. As a former "*atheist*" I believe I know what I'm talking about. Claiming to believe in nothing is an impossibility and is usually indicative of a person who is carrying around a lot of hurt and anger. God designed everyone with an inner program that reveals there is a God. Unfortunately many people seek and find their god in the wrong places and for the wrong reasons.

Romans 1:19-20 NLT:

<sup>19</sup> ***They know the truth about God** because he has made it obvious to them.*

<sup>20</sup> *For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.*

Romans 2:14-16 NLT:

<sup>14</sup> *Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it.*

<sup>15</sup> *They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.*

<sup>16</sup> *And this is the message I proclaim—that the day is coming when **God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone's secret life.***

The world does not seem to object to faith in general. But they do seem to object to biblical Christianity. Christianity teaches faith in God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ. This means acceptance of the truth of the work of Jesus Christ in providing for our salvation from sin by His death. We can place our faith in Him that what He did and what He taught was true because of His resurrection from the dead. Because Jesus was the only One to rise from the dead and be seen by over five-hundred witnesses before ascending upward into the heavens and beyond the clouds, people can logically believe that He was who He claimed to be, God incarnate. He was and is God, who took on the form of the

Man called Jesus, and came to earth so that sins might be forgiven and so that mankind might find eternal life.<sup>2</sup>

Why then is it that so many people today reject the Christian faith as it is given to us directly from God in the Bible? Because of the very sin for which Jesus came to die. And who is responsible for this sin that directs our minds away from the truth about the one-and-only God? It is none other than Satan himself and the vast army of fallen angels that serve under him.

Now a great number of people who hear this are immediately going to begin to snicker and scoff at the idea of Satan. They might even taunt whoever teaches this truth by saying something like, *"You mean the cute little guy in the red suit who carries that little pitchfork wherever he goes. You must be nuts if you think I am going to believe in a fairy tale like that."* Well, I know the drill because that is exactly what I used to say when I was an atheist and one of these Christian misfits would start to talk about the Bible and try to convince me it was true. I would say, *"Get a life. If there is a God, why doesn't He come down here and prove that He's real? I'll tell you why. Because He doesn't exist, so take your blankety-blank stupidity somewhere else and leave me alone."* Now I've cleaned up the actual language quite a bit.

If you feel that way, I want you to know that God understands and He does not hold your thoughts and feelings against you. We will get into more of this later, but for now bear with us for just a little while, because you see the Bible is basically a story about good versus evil. God represents all that is good and Satan represents all that is evil. If you give the Bible a chance and spend time reading it, this will begin to make sense to you. However, before you begin to read it ask God to help you understand it. He will grant your request.

You see no one in the world ever comes to faith in God and Jesus unless God Himself brings faith out of non-faith, just as He is able to bring life out of death or the whole of creation out of nothing. God not only creates and loves and dies for those whom He has created and who have fallen into sin, but He also leads them to faith, redemption, salvation, and eternal life, thereby creating in them what they could never create for themselves. This is the meaning of the great and moving story in the closing verses of John's gospel.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus appears here in verse 26 of John chapter 20 to lead Thomas to faith, and Thomas responds with the highest profession of faith in Jesus that is recorded in the pages of any of the Gospels. Thomas worships Jesus by saying, *"My Lord and my God"* (verse 28). If you sit quietly and meditate on this verse, its full impact may hit you like a freight train. Here is Thomas, who is the source of the saying, *"a doubting Thomas."* Even though he was told by the other apostles that Jesus was alive, he did not believe. But now Thomas calls Jesus Lord and God. Why did he address Jesus in this way? First we need to

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<sup>2</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *An Expository Commentary – John, Volume 5: Triumph through Tragedy (John 18-21)*, Paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1604-1610.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

understand the term “*Lord*” as it would relate to Jesus at this time.

“In Jesus’ day the Aramaic word *mari*, ‘my *Lord*,’ was coming into use as a title of respect in addressing human beings with authority, e.g., a rabbi, and it would appear that Jesus was so addressed (e.g., Matthew 7:21). Jesus insists that recognition of His authority requires obedience to the demands of God enunciated by Him. Thus, Jesus during His earthly life could be addressed as ‘*Lord*’ in recognition of His authority as a teacher (rabbi) and as a charismatic prophet (being empowered by the Holy Spirit) prophet.”<sup>4</sup>

“After Easter one of the most important OLD TESTAMENT texts to be applied to the Risen Christ was Psalm 110:1. Here the word ‘*Lord*’ is used both for God and for the messianic (referring to the special anointed One sent by God, the Savior, Jesus Christ) king (Acts 2:34). The application of this text to Jesus meant that the title *mari*, ‘my *Lord*,’ addressed to Him during His earthly life in recognition of His unusual authority was upgraded as a messianic address. Thus, we get the liturgical acclamation in Aramaic *marana tha*, ‘our *Lord*, come.’”<sup>5</sup>

1 Corinthians 16:21-22 NLT:

<sup>21</sup> *Here is my greeting in my own handwriting—Paul.*

<sup>22</sup> *If anyone does not love the Lord, that person is cursed. **Our Lord, come!***

Revelation 22:20 NLT:

*He who is the faithful witness to all these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon!” Amen! **Come, Lord Jesus!***

What Thomas said in these few words was a recognition that Jesus was God. First he had refused to believe in the resurrection, something which probably places him in an unfavorable light with some believers. But that is not quite fair, because how many of us at one time denied the resurrection as well? And even the other apostles doubted until Jesus appeared to them. The important thing is that Thomas realized his mistake and fully embraced Jesus as his Lord and God. Many of us have done that as well. Many other people have not and we should not forget to pray daily that they too will see the light, the truth, and embrace Jesus as their Lord and their God, as Thomas did. And let us never forget one indisputable fact: If we do believe, it is only because God is there beforehand leading us to do it. For those who continue to reject the truth Jesus is calling them to believe, there can be only one eventuality, and they will have an eternity to regret their foolishness.

We think it significant that Jesus would meet doubting Thomas at his level of unbelief in

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<sup>4</sup> Achtemeier, Paul J. ; Harper & Row, Publishers ; Society of Biblical Literature: *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. 1st ed. San Francisco : Harper & Row, 1985, S. 573

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

order to bring him to faith. This is something which Jesus is willing to do with any unbeliever. All they have to do is express an interest in learning the truth, keep an open mind, and Christ will meet them where they are and lead them to faith.

We also consider it significant to consider what preceded Jesus' appearance on the eighth day to lead Thomas to faith. James Montgomery Boice has commented that, "Even before Jesus came to Thomas, the other disciples had gone to him with the message that Jesus was risen, and it was undoubtedly because of their witness, even though it was not believed, that Thomas was with the others when Jesus appeared on that second Sunday."<sup>6</sup>

When a person will not believe or will not even join in fellowship with a group of Christians where the Gospel is preached and Christ is likely to make Himself known, we have a tendency to let them go their own way and turn them over to God. We might say something like, "*If they're ever going to be saved, God will have to do it.*" Well, it is certain that no one is ever saved without God doing the saving, but that does not mean that we should just stand by and wait for God to act. We can pray for the person; but then God often wants to send us into action so that we can be part of the salvation process. These disciples could not have known that Jesus would come that day for the benefit of Thomas, but they did know what was the right thing to do, and that was to keep Thomas with them in spite of what he had said and the doubts he had.

The disciples would not abandon Thomas because he did not yet share what they knew to be true. That is the function of the Church as well. If we recognize that someone attending the church is an unbeliever, or if perhaps we have a neighbor that is an unbeliever, we might set about exposing that person to the fellowship of believers and to the teaching of God's Word. "*If at first they don't believe, try, try again.*" As long as the person is willing to stay in relationship with other believers, we need to continue to make him/her feel welcome. Then one day the Holy Spirit may use all that you and others have done to bring that person to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

It was the result of the efforts of such a church that I came to know Christ. When I first decided to attend the church I did not have a clue who the God of the Bible was, who Jesus was, and I envisioned the Holy Spirit to be something like Caspar the friendly ghost. The people there must have thought that I was pretty much hopeless. But do you know what happened? Once I began to study the Bible and, with the help of a number of solid believers, I became addicted to the Bible. I wanted to know everything in it. You see that is what can happen to people when they read and listen to the Word of God.

Romans 10:17 NLT:

<sup>17</sup> *So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.*

Now in this situation, Thomas was out of line. He had demanded something he had no

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<sup>6</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *An Expositional Commentary – John, Volume 5: Triumph through Tragedy (John 18-21)*, Paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1604-1610.

right to demand. He had said, *"Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails are, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe it"* (verse 25). Thomas was a very pragmatic, concrete personality. His statement was in every aspect disrespectful toward Jesus. Yet Jesus came to the doubter, the unbeliever, as He always does. He appeared to Thomas and said, *"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side"* (verse 27).<sup>7</sup>

Just imagine that the One who created us and created this entire universe out of nothing, who died on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven, comes to us and says, *"I want you to be my brother and to join Me, living in the Kingdom of God forever. Here is the key to Heaven called faith that will open the door to eternal salvation. Will you accept it as a free gift from God who desires to adopt you as His son/daughter?"*

Even if you still do not get it, even if you still do not have enough proof to convince you, do not give up. Ask Him! You will find that God is far more anxious to reveal Himself to you than you are to find Him, and He will provide the proof you need. We do not think, however, that there is any greater proof that Christ is God than the love He shows us by the wounds He bears. My hero, Charles Spurgeon had a special anointing from God, and could produce the most extraordinary pictures with words. Listen to what he wrote on this very subject.

"In these times, when the foundations of our faith are constantly being undermined, one is sometimes driven to say to himself, 'Suppose it is not true.' As I stood, the other night, beneath the sky, and watched the stars, I felt my heart going up to the great Maker with all the love that I was capable of. I said to myself, 'What made me love God as I know I do? What made me feel an anxiety to be like him in purity? Whatever made me long to obey my God cannot be a lie.' I know that it was the love of Jesus for me that changed my heart, and made me, though once careless and indifferent to him, now to pant with strong desires to honor him. What has done this? Not a lie, surely. A truth, then, has done it. I know it by its fruits. If this Bible were to turn out untrue, and if I died and went before my Maker, could I not say to him, 'I believed great things of thee, great God; if it be not so, yet did I honor thee by the faith I had concerning thy wondrous goodness, and thy power to forgive?' and I would cast myself upon his mercy without fear. But we do not entertain such doubts; for those dear wounds continually prove the truth of the gospel, and the truth of our salvation by it. Incarnate Deity is a thought that was never invented by poet's mind, nor reasoned out by philosopher's skill. Incarnate Deity, the notion of the God that lived, and bled, and died in human form, instead of guilty man,... is itself its own best witness. The wounds are the infallible witness of the gospel of Christ."

Now when Thomas uttered, *"My Lord, and my God,"* no one had previously addressed the Lord as Thomas did. His statement represents a great insight of faith, perhaps even

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



greater than a similar confession of the apostle Peter, which was commended by Christ.

Matthew 16:13-17 NLT:

<sup>13</sup> *When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”*

<sup>14</sup> *“Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”*

<sup>15</sup> *Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?”*

<sup>16</sup> *Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”*

<sup>17</sup> *Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being.*

To quote Paul Achtemeier regarding John 20:28:

“This (John 20:28) is the high point of John’s Gospel. John shows here how one who began as a great doubter came by the grace of Christ to faith. No case is hopeless. Your case is not hopeless. God took Abraham, the pagan, and made him into a pillar of faith and the father of his people. He took Moses, the stammerer, and made him into the greatest vehicle for the communication of the word of God until Paul. He made the shepherd boy David into a king; Peter ‘*the weak*’ into Peter ‘*the rock*’; John the Son of Thunder into the apostle of love; Paul, the persecutor of Christians, into a faithful ambassador and martyr. He can do that for you. Allow Him to do it. Believe in Christ. Rather than being faithless, may you be one who, like Thomas, was found ‘*faith-full*.’”<sup>8</sup>

Christ transformed the doubter into a man full of faith, and He continues to transform people today.

John 20:30-31 NAS:

<sup>30</sup> *Therefore **many other signs** Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, **which are not written in this book;***

<sup>31</sup> *but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

John gives us the distinct impression that there were a whole lot more signs and wonders that he witnessed in the life of Jesus than those that were recorded in this book. John further tells us that it is the purpose of this gospel to help us understand what faith is all about and the kind of life that results from such faith. You may recall some of the most memorable verses from this book:

John 3:16 NLT:

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

*“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*

John 14:6 NLT:

*Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”*

John 5:24 NLT:

*“I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life.”*

Jesus did many things, but John did not record them all. He recorded only some. But he was sure to record enough of the things so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life through His name.<sup>9</sup> Jesus is God. That is all there is to it. This book has told us that over and over and it is what Jesus tried to make His disciples understand. Let us take a quick look back:

John 1:18 NLT:

*No one has ever seen God. But the one and only Son is himself God and is near to the Father’s heart. He has revealed God to us.*

John 10:30 NLT:

*“The Father and I are one.”*

John 20:28 NLT:

*“My Lord and my God!” Thomas exclaimed.*

The second member of the Triune God took the form of the Man Jesus and came to earth to show mankind what God was like.

John 3:17 NLT:

*God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.*

John 11:40-43 NLT:

<sup>40</sup> *Jesus responded, “Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believe?”*

<sup>41</sup> *So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, thank you for hearing me.*

<sup>42</sup> *You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me.”*

<sup>43</sup> *Then Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!”*

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<sup>9</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *An Expository Commentary – John, Volume 5: Triumph through Tragedy (John 18-21)*, Paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1616-1622.



John 16:27 NLT:

*for the Father himself loves you dearly because you love me and believe that I came from God.*

John 17:8 NLT:

*for I have passed on to them the message you gave me. They accepted it and know that I came from you, and they believe you sent me.*

The Father-Son relationship in one sense dominates this Gospel. The result of this relationship is that those who believe “will have life by the power of Jesus’ name.”<sup>10</sup>

Jesus speaks in verse 29 to future readers of this gospel. Thomas did believe but had to “see” in order to believe. Jesus drew a comparison with those who were yet to come to faith, namely those who would not have the opportunity of seeing Jesus after He arose from the grave. These future believers would have to come to faith without the advantage of seeing Jesus in person. Theirs would be a faith that would come from hearing as well as reading the written Word of God. Peter, in his first epistle, said it about as well as it could be said.<sup>11</sup>

1 Peter 1:8-12 NLT:

<sup>8</sup> *You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy.*

<sup>9</sup> *The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls.*

<sup>10</sup> *This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you.*

<sup>11</sup> *They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ’s suffering and his great glory afterward.*

<sup>12</sup> *They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen.*

So, in the troubled and uncertain times which we face today, John’s gospel offers much to comfort us, to guide us, and to give us a right perspective on the world situation.

God is God. He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and He came to earth in the form of Jesus Christ.

John 1:1-3 NAS:

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<sup>10</sup> Philip W. Comfort, ed., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary – Volume 13: John and 1-3 John*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2007), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 292.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1</sup> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

<sup>2</sup> *He was in the beginning with God.*

<sup>3</sup> *All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*

Jesus Christ brought hope to the hopeless, healing to the sick, and life to the dying. Before He died He told the disciples,

John 14:2-3:

<sup>2</sup> *"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.*

<sup>3</sup> *"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."*

Then Jesus came back to life and appeared to many of His followers. Today we took an in-depth look at His appearance to one particular individual. Thomas was hurt, disappointed, and grieving over the death of Jesus. He refused to accept what he feared was false hope when his friends tried to tell him Jesus was alive. Jesus knew that and Jesus cared so much for Thomas with his doubts, concrete thinking, anxieties, and fears that He made a special appearance just to answer his doubt-filled statements. The result? Thomas was overwhelmed with love and worship for his Lord.

What is our response when we hear all that Christ has done for us? When we see His hand in our lives, are we, like Thomas, overwhelmed with the sense: "My Lord and my God"? I pray so.