

Jesus Gives Peace
John 20:19-29
SERIES “So What”
Jarrett Stephens

I was with a group of pastors this past Monday, and had the opportunity to speak to them about “Why Preaching the Bible in a Systematic Way Matters.” It was a fun subject to talk about with a bunch of pastors and as I began, I recalled my calling into the ministry.

I first sensed God calling me to preach when I was 11 years old. I remember being in a Bible study, listening to a pastor lead it and I thinking to myself, “If I don’t coach football, I could do that right there.”

And then the Lord at 17 turned my heart completely toward pastoring and preaching, and I remember early on in my calling when people asked me what I thought I’d end up doing, I would tell them...well, you know how churches have “youth ministers” “music ministers”, associate pastors – I remember saying, I want to be a minister to doubters.

Because growing up, I struggled a lot with doubt. I remember doubting my salvation.

- I would be in church, and at times a guest evangelist would come in town and preach, and I was always sensitive to God’s Word and the preacher would say something like, “Do you know that you know that you know you are saved?” And I’d think, “Well, I did until you put it like that!”
- I can remember going to my student pastor and talking with him about the struggles I was having. Did I believe this stuff about Jesus for myself or am I just believing this because it’s what I grew up in?
- I remember being at summer camp and thinking, “how can I be saved if I am still struggling with sin so bad?”

And I was just plagued with doubt and so as I was considering this ministry call, I thought, “I really want to help people with doubt because it was such a struggle for me in middle school and high school.

In today’s message, we’re going to see someone who struggled with doubt. In fact, this guy’s name is synonymous with doubt...we call him “Doubting _____”- that’s right!

Doubting Thomas.

Our text today is, John 20:24-29. We are looking in this series at several of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus we have in scripture, and in doing so attempting to answer why the resurrection matters.

These historical accounts given to us by eyewitnesses are the greatest evidence we have for the resurrection and in each appearance of Jesus AFTER he was raised from the dead, we learn something about him, and we learn something about ourselves.

So far, we have talked about in previous messages: Jesus is Hope. Last week was Jesus brings Understanding.

And today...it's the title of the message: **Jesus gives Peace**

Our focus today is going to be on (v. 24-29) but I'm going to start reading in (v. 19) just for larger context's sake. I won't preach (v. 19-23) but will refer to them – and (v. 19-23) is on its own a separate post-resurrection appearance of Jesus.

John 20:19-29 – “On the evening of that day (Resurrection Sunday), the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. (may be the greatest understatement in all of history!)²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” (this is a commission to authoritatively preach the gospel and pronounce the forgiveness of sin that is available in Christ...and now or key verses for the day)
²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although 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, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

You read any commentary or listen to any pastor preach a message on this text and they are all going to say the same thing in that Thomas really does get a bad wrap. He is forever associated with something he struggled with but that's common to all of us – doubt.

There is NOT a person in this room that has not struggled at one time or another with doubt. And this is where I want to start today.

I want us to first note that: **Doubt is normal**

While I hate this story is in here for Thomas's sake – it becomes what he was known for forever, I sure am grateful that it's in here for me.

Thomas doubted...but he wasn't the only one that doubted – ALL the disciples did!
Mark's gospel records that when Mary came back and told the disciples that she had seen Jesus alive – (Mark 16:12) says, "they wouldn't believe it! Luke adds these words...no small detail here!

Luke 24:11 – “but these words (the fact that Jesus had been seen alive) seemed to be an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”

Doubt was normal after the resurrection, and when you look at the pages of scripture, it's always been normal. Some of the greatest people we know and love from scripture were doubters!

- David in the Psalms – “Where are you, God?”
- Job – the first 38 chapters of the book are filled with his doubts...
- Moses doubted. Abraham doubted.
- John the Baptist – Jesus said of him, “there has been no man born of a woman greater than JTB! He saw heaven open up, the dove descend, he baptized Jesus – and yet when he was imprisoned, he sent word to ask, “Are you really the Christ?”

I highlight all this to say doubt is normal from a spiritual perspective. You know why?

Because: **Doubt is natural**

Think about it! To exhibit faith, doubt MUST be a reality. If doubt wasn't present, you wouldn't need faith. These disciples – Thomas was right there with them...they watched Jesus die. And dead people don't get out of the grave!

Of course, they were going to doubt, and we shouldn't give them too hard of a time. Where faith is present, doubt will be close by.

Faith isn't the absence of doubt, it's choosing to trust in the midst of it.

So, as we get started today, let's underscore the fact that doubt is normal and natural. This means that DOUBT...hear this: Doubt is NOT the problem. The problem is unbelief.

In fact, when you read this passage of scripture (v. 24-29), it's not even doubt that Jesus addresses. He addresses unbelief.

John 20:27b – “...Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

He pinpoints Thomas's unbelief because of Thomas's own words:

John 20:24-25 – “Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

There is a HUGE difference between doubt and unbelief. It’s been said that “doubt is faith struggling to believe”. “Unbelief is the will refusing to bow”.

In other words, doubt will ask questions – “Could this be possible?” Unbelief will make statements...will make declarations – “There’s no way this could be true.”

In the scripture, to doubt is to be “pulled in two directions” – James, in his New Testament book calls this person “double-minded”.

Unbelief is NOT “double-minded”, unbelief is “close-minded”.

Thomas was flirting on the edges of “unbelief”, and unbelief – (that’s actually what the word is here) - it’s super dangerous from a spiritual perspective because unbelief hardens the heart!

- Unbelief is what leads you away from God...
- Unbelief is quitting on God...
- Unbelief is shutting the door on God...
- Unbelief is walking away from God...

Let me just read you two verses about unbelief to emphasize how dangerous it is. The first verse:

Matt. 13:58 – “And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.”

Jesus was in his hometown of Nazareth, and the people refused to believe that he was the Messiah...and their unbelief effectively prevented him doing all of what he could have done – refusing to believe in some ways handcuffed Deity – that’s something to think about! The second verse:

Heb. 3:12 – “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.”

An unbelieving heart is a hard heart...it’s a calloused heart. And the more we refuse to believe and act in faith to what God is telling us to do, the harder our heart gets, and the harder our heart gets the harder it is for God to break through. It’s not that he stops speaking, it’s that unbelief deadens us to his voice.

And btw - this word “disbelieve” that John uses here – every time it’s used in the New Testament, it’s used to describe one who is “faithless” and who is outside of a true relationship with God, and the end result for “unbelievers” who live in “unbelief” (Rev. 21:8) is the “second death” – that’s separation from God forever and ever.

Unbelief left to run its course has an eternal destination. So, let's make sure we establish today that doubt is NOT the issue, unbelief not dealt with is. And this is why we have to be extremely careful because doubts left unsettled can lead to unbelief – this is where Thomas was.

Jesus knew this and in his grace so he comes to him and settles him...reassures him...and gives him peace.

John 20:26 – “Eight days later (after appearing to the other disciples), his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

The disciples are locked in a room behind closed doors...they are hiding out in fear for their lives...probably waiting to see if Jesus will show up again! They have questions...they are – pardon the word choice, NO DOUBT having doubts, and Jesus just shows up IN the room.

On TWO occasions in the larger context of this passage (v. 19,26) Jesus just shows up behind locked doors...this isn't accidental. John is a careful writer. Those locked doors are represented of how the disciples are feeling.

And Jesus. He doesn't knock...he doesn't come through the door...he just appears!

I love that you can lock doors in your life...we all have rooms inside of us that we try to keep people out of, but there is no keeping the resurrected Jesus out. When he wants to come in, he just shows up!

Now, I want you to notice the actions Jesus takes in this passage because what he SAYS and what he DOES results in peace. This is the “HOW” behind Jesus giving peace.

1. He speaks his Word

Three times in this larger passage Jesus speaks “peace” over them., and he does it again here in (v. 26) specifically to/for Thomas.

You go to Israel today and you will hear the greeting and the salutation, “Shalom” – peace. It's this idea of a state of being signifying wholeness and well-being. When you say it to someone you are giving a blessing of sorts over their life – that they would experience peace and rest internally and externally.

Well, when Jesus died and rose again, “Shalom” moved from a greeting to a proclamation of a new state of being. Because of his resurrection, the disciples can now have and walk in the fullness of “Shalom”.

It's no longer a wish...it's a reality. He gives you peace. Three times he speaks his Word to them – “Peace”.

- In the midst of chaos...

- in the midst of confusion...
- in the midst of fears...
- in the midst of doubts...

Jesus speaks his word. I don't know what your doubts are:

- It maybe you doubt God can forgive you...
- Or you doubt God loves you...
- Or you doubt God's presence in your life...
- Or you doubt God can or wants to use you...

But if you want those doubts to grow more quiet in your life, you have to get into his presence and listen to his word...BECAUSE this is what he does. When we're in his presence, he speaks!

And his Word gives us peace – “shalom” in its fullness.

Illus. Jesus calming the storm – I liken it to the story of Jesus in Mark's gospel. He and the disciples are in a boat. And the Bible says a “great (mega) windstorm arose (Mark 4:35-41) and waves were breaking into the boat. The disciples were scared for their lives, and do you remember what Jesus was doing?

He was asleep! What was rocking the disciple's world was rocking Jesus to sleep! I love that. They wake him up, “master we're dying, don't you care?” Jesus gets up and do you remember what he does? He speaks peace!

Mark 4:39 – “**And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.**”

It went from a great (mega) storm in (v. 37) to a great (mega) calm in (v. 39) all because Jesus spoke words of “peace” over those rough waters...it became like a sea of glass.

Doubt has a way internally making us feel like we're in a mega-storm. Nothing can twist us up and cause our gut to turn like doubt!

- Is God really hearing my prayer?
- Does God really love me – if he did then why am I going through this right now?
- Can God really forgive this? I don't think he can!

And the doubts have us like a wave of the sea. What do you do in times like this?

I'm telling you...get alone with the Lord and open his word and LISTEN to it, and it won't be long until you'll hear the same words the disciples did out on the lake that day and the same words they hear behind those locked, closed doors – PEACE.

This is the power of the word of God. It's why we MUST give our lives to it. The word of the Lord brings peace.

Illus. Visiting hospitals – One of my favorite verses to quote is:

Isaiah 26:3 – “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.”

Jesus gives us his peace through his word, and we will receive peace when our ears are tuned in, listening to it. A second way Jesus give his peace, is NOT just in what he says, but in what he does. And that is:

2. He shows his wounds

When Jesus shows up, he gives evidence of who he is. And in both occasions (when Thomas wasn't there and when he was) Jesus did the same thing! He showed them his nail-pierced hands. He showed them his spear-pierced side.

Let's not miss this! Peace came...and we can say fear and confusion and doubt left as a result of seeing Jesus and KNOWING it was him – and how did they know it was him?

His wounds. The risen Christ is identified by his scars!

BTW – did you know that's the only man-made thing that will be in heaven? The wounds of the Lord Jesus Christ. His wounds are a reminder to us that peace came through pain...there's a cost associated with it!

Commentator, **Edward Klink** – “**The display of wounds is not simply an act of identification, a proof to the disciples that the man standing in their midst is Jesus. Rather, they explain the source of his peace. The peace of God was entirely dependent on these specific wounds—the scars from the crucifixion declare shalom for the world. Isaiah was speaking about this very encounter when he announced that “the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”**

Now, Thomas was no doubt in the dark. Can you imagine what he must have been feeling? To miss out on seeing Jesus...and the tense of the text – (v. 25) – “So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord” – it's this idea of they kept telling him and talking about it!

He had to be miserable! To miss being in the room where it happened...the room where happened...the room where it happened!

I wonder why Thomas wasn't there?

Scripture doesn't tell us. Could have been that he was discouraged and so he took off! Thomas is mentioned two other times in scripture and you get the sense in reading about him and his personality that he had a tendency to kind of be a glass half-empty kind of guy.

Again, I think we need to give the guy a break. His dreams were just shattered. What had happened to his Messiah Savior was worse than anyone could have ever imagined. I think what he wanted more than anything was to sit in his misery by himself and was probably just spiraling downward and spinning out emotionally.

He did the exact opposite of what he needed to do though– we talked about this last week!

Listen: when you are discouraged...down...and let me add now – when you have doubts DON'T get away or avoid people...especially God's people. THIS is when you need community and the Church the MOST!

Where are you going to hear his word? It's going to be by being in your Bible...being in church listening to the Bible being preached.

If you are a doubter, you've got to press into community during these times, NOT avoid it! Look at what Thomas missed because he wasn't in the room!

But Jesus, in his grace shows up...he speaks peace...and notice, he doesn't rebuke Thomas! Nor did he rebuke his disciples earlier – “Where'd y'all go?!” “When I was lifted up on the cross, I was looking for you?”

He didn't say anything like that...instead, he gently turns to Thomas and addresses what he knew he was struggling with:

John 20:27 – “Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

Don't miss that Jesus addressed what was in Thomas's heart. Jesus KNEW Thomas was struggling! It's why he went straight to him...AND take note that scripture doesn't even tell us IF Thomas did what Jesus told him to...I don't think he did.

In other words, I don't think he touched the wounds...seeing them was enough and in seeing them, Thomas makes one of the greatest confessions of faith in all of scripture.

One commentator I read this week noted: “No other person in scripture makes a confession as strong as this one.”

In his ministry BEFORE the resurrection, Jesus was confessed as:

- The Son of David (Bartimaeus)...
- The Messiah, the son of the living God (Peter)...
- The King of Israel (Palm Sunday) ...

But, here...Thomas in seeing his wounds, makes an incredible confession:

John 20:28 – “Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

If you are here and doubting today...like I mentioned earlier:

- It may be you doubt God can forgive you...
- Or you doubt God loves you...
- Or you doubt God's presence in your life...
- Or you doubt God can or wants to use you...

Can I just tell you to focus on his wounds. By faith look at his wounds and see how much he loves you. You stare at the wounds of Christ, and I believe your doubts will dissipate.

It won't be long until like, Thomas, you too will be saying, "MY Lord and MY God."

So, let's get to some application here as we bring this message to a close. There are some here today that are being plagued with doubt.

Allow me to share some practical ways (and I've just lifted these from the text) that may help.

1. Name it

This is what Thomas did. Look again at (v. 25).

John 20:25 – “So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

I say we give Thomas props for at least being honest and naming what his doubt was. He didn't pretend...he didn't smile, nod and act like everything was okay.

No...he put it on the table and named his doubt.

Have you done that? This is where it starts...it starts with getting honest with the Lord. Remember, God doesn't get angry with our doubts and questions and fears...when he came into the room with the disciples and later with Thomas, he came in love and gave his peace.

2. Wrestle it

Illus. Lee Strobel – author of several books, his first was a best-seller called *Case For Christ*. He was an atheist. He was a Yale Law School graduate and worked as the legal affairs editor for the *Chicago Tribune*, and set out to discredit the resurrection.

Over the course of time in studying and interviewing scholars (21 months) he finally came to the point where he ended up bending his knees to Jesus. Listen to what he writes about doubt:

Lee Strobel – “Christians can have doubts and they can have questions and the unhealthy way to deal with that is to keep them inside where they fester and grow and can undermine our faith. The healthy way to deal with it is to talk about it and be honest about it...God

doesn't get angry at us when we express our hesitations about him. It's fine to ask questions about God. It's permissible to wrestle with objections to Christianity. It's even okay to have doubts, as long as you pursue solid answers."

Look at John 20:26 – "Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

Did you catch that first part? EIGHT DAYS LATER, the disciples are locked in the room, and Thomas is there with them. He's hanging around, and don't you know he was wrestling with that doubt the whole time.

Just imagine being Thomas! The women associate they were close to have seen Jesus. The other ten disciples had seen Jesus. Others that had followed Jesus (the two on the road to Emmaus) have seen Jesus.

But Thomas hadn't. That would be a tough pill to swallow. I mean, Thomas was one of the original twelve. He was there for Jesus and with Jesus during his three-year ministry – why hasn't he got to see him?!

If I was Thomas, I think I'd definitely be having some doubts.

- I'd be doubting if Jesus was alive probably. Dead people don't just rise from the dead.
- If there was an inkling of hope there, I'd be doubting whether he loved me or cared for me. After-all I'm the ONLY one of the disciples that he hasn't shown himself to.
- Knowing me, I'd probably be replaying in my mind things that have gone on in the past and asking myself where I went wrong or what's wrong with me that I haven't seen him.

When we have doubts, let's name them...let's wrestle them down.

Let's give Thomas SOME credit here. He's still around the disciples. He's still trucking along...he hasn't completely thrown in the towel, so let's not be too hard on him!

Again, doubt is normal and natural. So, name your doubt – be honest about it. Wrestle your doubt – don't just throw in the towel. Read, pray, seek answers, go to lectures that are at places like the Lanier Library, do the research, listen to podcasts, watch videos online. Find answers to your questions.

And one final thing in dealing with doubt:

3. Share it

Share in community about how you are battling your doubt and as God gives you victory share how you overcame your doubt. I can promise you, wherever doubt is plaguing you, you're not the only one to experience it and as you share, you will be helped by others and will be helping others process their own doubts.

I guarantee you at the beginning when I shared about my experiences with doubt some of you breathed a sigh of relief and thought, "I don't feel that bad now...if pastor struggled with doubts, and was able to move past it, I can too."

Sharing your doubts will only help you and as you overcome them help others. Don't you know that Thomas after all of this had a testimony to share as he traveled and preached the gospel. I'm betting he used THIS story to encourage others to DOUBT their doubts and believe by faith.

History tells us that Thomas took the gospel further than any of the other disciples...he went all the way to India proclaiming the peace of Christ and sharing how he was once on the verge of unbelief until Jesus showed up and gave him peace.

Your doubt resolved could just be the word that frees someone up to fully trust in the Lord...so share your doubts and how God has helped you overcome.

Jesus said something to Thomas after his confession that we need think through as we close today.

John 20:29 – “Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

He's talking about me and you. Thomas got to see Jesus. He got to hear with his ears the audible voice of Christ...to look at the wounds with his physical eyes. The truth is that's not going to happen for us. We must look at Jesus by faith.

And Jesus says when we do...we are blessed – this is for EVERY one of us in the room – we are blessed when we believe by faith.

Look...don't let doubt or disbelief have the last word. Instead, look to Jesus by faith, listen to his word...look at his wounds, and say with Thomas, “my Lord and my God!”

Will you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.