

Easter Sermon: The Saving Hands of Jesus

John 20:24-29

Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith on April 20, 2025

Read Text

Dealing with Faith

As we read through the interactions that Jesus had with his followers after the resurrection, we notice something. Every time Jesus shows up after he's risen, He is dealing with faith. In the text, he tells Thomas to not be faithless, but to believe.

Jesus tells Thomas to not be unbelieving. It is an interesting way to call someone to faith. Jesus tells Thomas to stop doubting and believe.

I mean, on one hand I get it. The disciples knew that Jesus died. One of them even saw it. But they had also seen his miracles and they had heard his teaching. They had spent all of that time with him and yet they weren't changed concerning faith. For them to believe, they would need to meet the Risen Lord. That is when they were transformed by faith.

The Bible says that it is the same for us too. For all of us. It is not enough to believe in the teaching of Jesus. It is not enough to believe in his deity – that he is God. You have to meet the Risen Lord by faith. If that doesn't happen, the power of God does not come into your life.

So, if you say that you believe in his teaching, but you don't believe that he was raised from the dead, you don't believe that he is really Lord and God physically raised at a specific moment in history. The Bible says that if you cannot believe that then you are not a Christian.

Until Thomas met the risen Lord, there was no power, no revolution. Not until he met him by faith. There wasn't anything dramatically unusual about Thomas's life – until he met the risen Lord.

That is why it was so important for Jesus to say to Thomas "This is not an illusion. Thomas, you have to believe that is not an illusion. You must believe that I am raised from the dead. Put your fingers in the marks in my hands. See for yourself that I am real and I am alive. Believe."

It is why Peter says in 1 Peter 1:3 that we are given a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without belief in the actual Resurrection of Jesus, there is no new birth. There is no new life, no living hope, no transformation without believing by faith in the resurrection.

It is why Paul said in Romans 10:10 that if you confess with your mouth and *believe in your heart that Jesus is resurrected from the dead, you are saved*. You are not saved because you believe Jesus is good. You are not saved because you believe that church is important. You are not saved because you think the teaching of Jesus is good moral philosophy. You are saved BECAUSE you think Jesus ROSE FROM THE DEAD.

Resurrection is the faith point, it is the hinge that swings everything in your life. Not the teachings. Not the miracles. Not the great moral philosophy. Not the tradition. The resurrection. You want to be saved? You MUST meet the resurrected Lord by faith.

You can have a comprehensive, complete and full understanding of Christian faith – what it all means and how it all came to be. But without faith in the risen Lord Jesus, there is simply no power of God in your life.

In this account with Thomas, we see a few true things about what faith really is.

Faith is Impossible. Thomas had seen Jesus to all of the amazing things you and I read about or watch in movies and on tv shows. Thomas saw Jesus walk on water. He saw Jesus feed five thousand and even raise the dead. Thomas had heard Jesus claim to rise from the dead on the third day. (this was a claim Jesus made often enough that his enemies knew about it and posted a guard at the tomb).

And then on that Sunday following the resurrection day appearances that Thomas missed, the others find Thomas and tell him. And what was the only rational response that Thomas could muster once he had heard the stone was rolled away?

Now, consider all of the amazing things that Thomas had seen Jesus do. Understand that not ONE of Jesus's promises failed. And remember that Jesus promised again and again that he would rise again.

With all of that in mind, what should Thomas's reaction had been? To agree that Jesus was alive. "Well, maybe they're right? Jesus must've done what he said he would do." Jesus has tremendous power and has never broken a promise. Instead, Thomas said, "Unless I see him, put my finger in his wounded hands, I will not believe."

What is wrong with Thomas? Unbelief is not a vacuum. Unbelief is not the absence of faith, it is the presence of something else. Unbelief is a positive substance in the Bible.

Matthew 11, Jesus says "What should I compare this generation to? They are children in the marketplace..." Jesus is talking about the peevishness of children. If a child does NOT get his way, if the child is unhappy because you didn't let him do this or that, there is NOTHING you can do. No matter what you say, the child will deny what deep down inside he really likes. Why? Because the child is trying to get control back. The human heart does this. It denies and resists even what it most wants, if it discovers that in order to get it, it has to lose control to someone else. There is a primordial desire that the heart has to stay in charge. It wants control. It is easy to see in children and only humorous because they're small.

Consider a toddler. If a toddler actually had the power to do to you what they want to do to you when you take that toy away that they want, they would take your head off and not think twice about it. "She just wants to watch the world burn." Jesus says, "To what should I liken this generation? Peevish kids." It is funny in kids but not in us. We will and we do infallibly deny to ourselves and resist the love of Christ that we really really want but we will not admit that we want it. Because if it means to get it we have to lose control, we will deny it and spite ourselves. We will be unhappy! No prize for you! As long as we can keep control. Jesus says that is the way every human heart is. Therefore faith is impossible. Therefore, Jesus himself is the only one who can give it to us. He is the perfect physician – he is the only one who can give us faith. A great physician not only prescribes medicine for the disease, but also for the patient. A great doctor has to consider the factors of the patient to prescribe the medicine.

Look at how Jesus prescribes faith to his followers: To John the thinker he gets evidence. Mary the lover and she gets called by name. Here is Thomas the doubter and he gets the touch. Peter the proud gets humbled. Whatever we need in order to have faith, Jesus will give it to us. It is a gift. Until you admit that you can't believe, as soon as you admit you don't have faith, that is the beginning of faith.

2. Faith is Personal – faith is in a person and not an abstract principle. Christianity is not a general message of love and peace and justice and equality. Thomas had Jesus's teaching but did not know personally that Jesus was raised from the dead. Their lives were not transformed. What really turned their lives from defeat into triumph was meeting Christ.

Most churches will say this: "We can't really know we can believe in the physical resurrection anymore. We don't know if a lot of these legends are true. We're modern people, enlightened and it is difficult for us to believe. BUT we believe in the teaching and the spirit of Christianity. Love, equality, love your neighbor and the golden rule. Thomas had those principles. He knew them. He had been taught them and he was in defeat. Because the Christian message is not a general theory or a bunch of abstract moral principles. It is about Jesus.

There was a person that was God. He came to earth and really lived a life. He really died a death for us and really was raised from the grave and until you see that your life will not be changed.

If you could personify the NT, when you read the NT it refuses to talk to you about how to live life successfully. It refuses to talk to you about what is good and bad and how to make the world a better place. Instead, it says I cannot tell you anything until you believe in him. Nothing I tell you will make sense until you believe in him. The Bible refuses to even deal with you. It says look, before I can tell you about these other things, Christianity is faith in a person and unless He is in the center of things, unless he is the center of the scheme of your thinking, nothing the Bible tells you will make sense. There is a sense in which the Bible refuses to talk to you about anything before you decide what you believe about Jesus.

Three ducks on a pond – “My end stinks too, but it is not telling me anything!”

“My Bible doesn’t tell me anything.” Well, how can it if you don’t have faith in Christ? The teaching without faith is nonsense according to the Bible. The teaching, the moral values apart from the framework of Christ doesn’t work.

Christian faith is in a person, not a general message. You have to read the Bible to get a sense of who Jesus is. It is not a textbook that you read academically. Jesus is not a theorem you read about. He is a person that you talk to; you speak to him. Pray, read God’s word. If you think Christianity is a pile of principles, you have it all wrong.

- Mom had a map in the car but never used it and we got lost. But she would always say, “I’ve got a map.”

Some of you are chasing after someone that you’ve never found, and you don’t realize it. Go to Jesus and ask him, “Are you the one I am looking for?” And he will reveal himself to you. Jesus is a person, not a pile of abstract principles that you pick apart. If this is your approach to Christianity, you will never get it because you will never know Jesus. Faith is in a person, not abstract principles.

3. Faith is Foundational – Anatomy of faith here. It starts with a convinced mind. You grapple with evidence. Read the scripture. Consider the historical evidence of the resurrection. Pistos – believe – always used with a preposition (ace – meaning into) – the word believe that is used by the NT is a word that is always means to believe into something – it is, sadly, never translated that way – all through the NT belief means believing into something. It is not just having your mind convinced, but you actually have to believe into it. You have to put a new foundation in your life and rest on it.

- Soldiers who fought in WWI would spend weeks in trenches – and you had do everything crouched down. Everyone who stood up was shot at and could be killed quickly. For weeks they walked around crouched down. And then one day, over the radio that they had been listening to for

communications suddenly reported a cease fire, that the war was over. The enemy on the other side is already evacuating. The war is over! Now, the soldiers had never gotten a wrong message on that radio before. There was no reason in the world NOT to believe it. They were convinced that the war was over. Now, the real question would be, “who would be the first person to stand up?”

It is one thing to have a convinced mind. It is another thing to believe INTO that message. When the Philippian jailor discovered there had been an earthquake and the jail doors were open, he was ready to commit suicide. You know why? Because everybody has a foundational belief into something. Or we couldn't even live. Some have belief into a career. Others have belief into a relationship, a boyfriend or a girlfriend. Others into money, looks, status – something. Why was the Philippian jailor ready to kill himself? Because he was a jailor and he had failed. The foundation of his life had been laid bare by this disaster and there was NOTHING ELSE to rely on. Nothing to live for. And Paul calls to him from inside the jail cell and says, “Don't hurt yourself. We're still here.” What did the jailor do? Did he run straight away and lock the doors back up? Whew! What a close call. You guys were so STUPID not to have left. Instead, he ran in and got down on his knees before Paul and said, “What must I do to be saved?” The danger was over. What is left to be upset about? The worst has past. He realized that he was in peril. His life was built on an insecure foundation. What he had built his life and belief and faith into was a bubble that could burst any moment and that was no way to live. Paul tells him to transfer his trust from being a great jailor to Jesus.

Real faith is foundational. Real faith means believing into him. Real faith means building your life on him. Real faith is not just a convinced mind. Paul said:

2 Timothy 1:12 “...because I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day.”

This is Paul saying I have deposited myself into the bank that is Jesus Christ.

4. Faith is Unconditional – Thomas said “I will believe if...” Jesus shows up and says, “You wanted to touch my hand, go ahead. Touch me. Put your finger into the holes. Stick your hand into my side. Make your hands the physical agency of your probing faith. Believe into that. Use your hands, be convinced.

Thomas doesn’t do it. All Thomas says is, “My Lord and my God.” Thomas sees the audacity of putting conditions on his faith. “If God does this for me, THEN I will believe.” Thomas does not touch him. By saying, “I will believe you IF...I will obey you IF...” you are still trying to keep control.

Thomas realized how silly it is. It is like a flea trying to take an elephant for a pet. “I will obey IF you explain this. Tell me why THIS happened. If you can promise me that if I believe and trust in you, then these bad things WON’T happen.” Isn’t that where some of you are? You want to believe conditionally so you can control everything?

Thomas sees the wounds, he drops his conditions. You will never ever find Jesus unless you drop your conditions. When he sees the wounds, Thomas suddenly says, “How can I come to grips with someone who has given himself utterly for me without me giving myself utterly to him.” You have to give yourself completely to him. Christian friends, some of you are confused today because you have put conditions on your obedience like Thomas.

Consider Mary on the resurrection morning: She was so sure of what SHOULD happen, that when she met Jesus she missed him. She thought he was an enemy. She said, “Sir, have you taken him away?” Some of you here this morning, Christians, because God is not doing things in your life the way you want, you are missing him and treating him as an enemy.

Drop your conditions and he will call you by name. Drop your conditions and say, “My Lord and my God.”

Drop your conditions, put yourself IN HIS HANDS.

Jesus can take a stammerer like Moses and make him a prophet.

Jesus can take a coward like Peter and make him a rock.

Jesus can take a doubter like Thomas and make him a witness.

Jesus has a blueprint for your greatest life. It is all on his drawing board. Until you drop your conditions, and you give yourself into His hands, nobody will know what it is.