

Life Group Discussion Guide

Locked Doors, Open New Life
John 20:24–29

Along with Christmas, Easter Sunday is the biggest Sunday of the year for the Christian church. It's the day we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. To be clear, when we speak of resurrection, there are a couple of things we don't mean:

- a. We don't mean that following the death of Jesus, his earliest disciples collectively had a hallucination where they thought they saw Jesus alive again, but he really wasn't.
- b. We don't mean the resurrection of Easter hope, in which what matters is not the body of Jesus, but that His disciples had this subjective but powerful awakening to a new possibility of life.

What we do mean is what the Scriptures say and what orthodox Christians have believed for the last two millennia—that following His execution by Roman crucifixion, within 36 to 40 hours Jesus was not in the tomb anymore. He appeared to His disciples in His human body for a period of 40 days, and He still has the same human body today. Jesus came back from the dead, and His body is indestructible.

That is what we mean by resurrection. Is that difficult? To be sure.

1. The Difficulty of the Resurrection

"Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.'" John 20:24–25

The day of His resurrection, Jesus appeared to some of the women and then to the apostles collectively, but Thomas was not present. When Jesus appeared to them, John records, "The disciples were overjoyed." In their joy, they tell Thomas, "We have seen the Lord!" But Thomas is not overjoyed. He's skeptical.

Now, earlier in the Gospels, we get the impression that Thomas is a solid follower of Jesus. By his devotion to Jesus and hunger for His words it seems that he's all in. So, where is this skepticism coming from? The bottom line is, the resurrection is difficult. And here's why:

- a. The resurrection defies our knowledge of the natural world

"Of the billions and billions of people who've ever lived, every single one that dies stays dead. Jesus brought some people back from death, but they died again. That's not what we're

talking about. We're talking about someone who went into death and from within death had life come back into His body and death can't touch him again. Someone who defeated death forever. So Thomas is quite sensible when he says, 'I've got to see it, or I won't believe.'"

b. The resurrection takes away our sense of control

"Thomas knows that if what they're saying is true, his life as he knew it is over. Everything must change. That sense of losing control is why many people never become Christians."

Have you wrestled with the difficulty of the resurrection? There are many who consider themselves Christians yet live however they want. But how could you believe in someone who's still alive 2,000 years after His birth yet live as if He's your least concern and lowest priority? As Pastor Jon put it, "There's a disconnect, either with your intellect or in your soul."

- Answer the question posed above: Have you wrestled with the difficulty of the resurrection? If so, reflect on how that wrestling changed you. If not, take time to do so now. After a time of personal reflection, discuss together.

2. The Encounter with the Resurrection

"A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'" John 20:26-27

Although the doors are locked, suddenly, Jesus is standing in their midst. Whether He passed through the walls, or simply appeared, He's in the room—but He's not a ghost. We know this because, in essence, He says to Thomas, Touch my body. It's me.

We can easily say Thomas would never have an encounter as destabilizing as this. No hurricane or tornado could give him as strong a shake. Imagine the questions and fears flooding his mind. How could someone who has gone through death be alive again, someone who is very much a human yet clearly is not constrained by the natural world? Everything he thinks he knows is crumbling.

"Have you encountered the resurrection of Jesus in this way? I don't mean to ask if you've heard of it. I mean, have you fallen to the ground, broken and aware that you are a mere mortal, a sinner, and God is great?"

This is why Jesus says to them, "Peace be with you!" Because, although their world is spinning, He wants them to know that He is good—that as commanding and mighty and perplexing as He is, what He brings to them is peace. That's what the resurrection brings to those who receive Jesus.

- Have you been "destabilized" by the resurrection? Has it brought you to your knees? Tell about it.

- Does your lifestyle today demonstrate that you've encountered the resurrected Jesus? Why do you answer that way?

3. The Meaning of the Resurrection

"Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!' Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" John 20:28-29

Having encountered the resurrected Jesus, Thomas is the first to confess what billions of Christians have since confessed about Christ: "My Lord and my God!"

"On the lips of a first century devout Jew, Lord and God here could only mean that Jesus is the God of Israel, the Maker of heaven and earth and everything in them, the Giver of the Law of Moses, the Judge of the living and the dead, the Savior of all who come to him with a humble heart. That's the meaning of the resurrection. God has come to remake the world. God has come to burst through locked doors and offer new open life to all who trust him. This is the gospel."

Thomas' declaration leads us to our Big Idea: The resurrection blasts through our broken-down, locked-up life. If you imagine yourself in the locked-up room that is your life, trusting the power of the resurrection means that Jesus comes and stands right in the room with you—as He did with Thomas—and speaks His peace to you and opens you up to new possibilities, dreams, and hopes.

- What part of your life is broken down and locked up right now?
- Take time now to invite the risen Jesus into your broken-down, locked-up life, trusting the power of His resurrection and receiving His peace.

Jesus responds to Thomas, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Why is it more blessed to believe without seeing? In John 4:48 Jesus says, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe." Believing without seeing means we've overcome our fascination with and demand for signs and have come to know, instead, the trustworthiness of our God. He has not left himself without witness in Scripture, in history, and in our personal experience. He can be fully trusted and known without any signs.

"Can we then say, 'My Lord and My God,' simply because we are alive and life itself is a miracle from God? Simply because He has not left himself without witness to His goodness in our lives? Simply because He has died to save us from our sins?"

- What reasons do you have to believe in Jesus although you haven't seen Him?
- Take time now to glorify your Lord and God for blasting through your broken-down, locked-up life. Praise the resurrected Jesus!