



The year was 1436. A scholar named Thomas Arezzo was in a fish shop, and in that shop there was a pile of wrapping paper that was used to wrap up the fish. In this pile, Thomas discovered an ancient copy of a letter from the 2nd century. This letter is referred to as the Letter to Diognetus, and it's an explanation and defense of Christianity. Diognetus did not follow Christian teaching, but he clearly had questions and was willing to engage the author of this letter. And, this author (who is unknown), answers various questions as to the legitimacy of and reasons for worshipping Jesus. Towards the end of his letter, he then speaks to experiential evidence that Christianity is true. And, his evidence is the martyrdom of Christians. He writes, **“[Have you not seen Christians] flung to the wild beasts to make them deny their Lord, and yet remaining undefeated? Do you not see how the more of them suffer such punishments, the larger grows the number of the rest? These things do not look like the work of man; they are the power of God, and the evident tokens of his presence.”** (as quot. in “Rediscovering the Church Fathers,” Haykin, p. 65)

How did the early church grow in number when so many Christians were murdered by Rome? This author says it's a miracle of God. It's a miracle of God that's worked through the death and resurrection of Jesus. In that letter to Diognetus, the author shows us that people's lives are radically changed and shaped by Jesus and what he did for us. In one portion of the letter, the author continued by saying, **“Instead of hating us and rejecting us and remembering our wickedness against us, [God] showed how long-suffering he is. He bore with us, and in pity . . . gave his own Son as a ransom for us – the Holy for the wicked, the Sinless for sinners, the Just for the unjust, the Incorruptible for the corruptible, the Immortal for the mortal. . . O sweet exchange! O unsearchable working! O benefits un hoped for! – that the wickedness of multitudes should thus be hidden in the One righteous, and the righteousness of One should justify the countless wicked!”**

Jesus, who lived a little over 100 years before this author, not only shaped this man's thinking, but changed this author's life. And not only this author, but many other Christian's lives, too! This morning, I want to highlight, from the Bible, the same kind of argument as that of the author of this letter. I'm going to focus on three people who are mentioned in Jesus' resurrection account with the desire that you will see that **Jesus' resurrection gives hope**. Now, when I say “hope,” I don't just mean that it gives us a wish. I mean “steadfast assurance” in the face of life and death because your joy and reconciliation is in God – the eternal One who is Creator, Sustainer and Satisfaction of your soul.

Do you want hope? Do you feel like your life is a cycle of incidents that don't really matter? Do you ever wonder, “What's the point?” Today, let's remind ourselves of the resurrection narrative again.

I'm going to begin by reading from John 20:11-18. Please turn to John 20 if you haven't already. John 20:11-18 says, ¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. ¹²And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. ¹³They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴Having said this, she turned around

and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her. ¹

1. Mary Magdalene’s living hope.

Who is Mary Magdalene? In Luke 8:2 we are told that Jesus cast seven demons from Mary. And, from that moment, Mary was a disciple of Jesus. We’re also told in Luke 8:3 that she, along with other women, helped to support Jesus and the disciples in their mission. Imagine being Mary. Being demon possessed means that she was a social outcast. She’s considered unclean by the community. No one to really care for her, love her. And who would want to love someone who was driven by demons? Her life was hopeless. Then Jesus and his love pervades her life. He commands the demons to flee. This action doesn’t simply lead to Mary going back to the way things used to be. Mary’s whole trajectory of life is different. The level of commitment from Mary Magdalene is a testament that she was graced by Jesus, forgiven much and set free by Jesus.

Then, she receives the startling news that Jesus was taken into custody, convicted of blasphemy and is now facing the Roman cross. What is Jesus going to do? Many of the male disciples fled, but Mary stayed. She, who had been ravaged by demons, is now watching Jesus, as his body had been ravaged by the scourging and then the torture of the cross. Jesus then dies, is placed in a tomb. What does Mary do? Her life was Jesus. He was her Savior. And she continues to honor him even though his body’s in a tomb. Early on Sunday morning, she goes to take spices for his body. But Mary sees the stone had been moved from the entrance. She then goes to tell Peter and John – and they go running to the tomb to investigate. Of course, they discover Jesus isn’t there, but his graveclothes are there, nice and folded. Then they go back home.

In this gospel account, John could have forgotten about Mary and moved on, but Mary’s an important character. We get back to verse 11, and we find her crying in the garden. There could be a myriad of reasons for these tears, all related to questions about what is taking place. John tells us that the disciples really didn’t understand before this that Jesus had to rise from the dead. And while Peter and John go, Mary stays. She still has questions. She stoops to look into the tomb, and as she looks the angels appear. They ask why she’s weeping. She gives the obvious answer: they have taken her Lord and she doesn’t know where. She then turns around and sees Jesus, but doesn’t know it’s him. She’s asked again why she’s weeping. But then Jesus adds, “Whom are you seeking?” This question adds importance. Is she weeping for a dead man who’s bound in the grave or is she looking for the Living Messiah?

Mary then pleads with Jesus saying, “If you took him away, tell me where he is and I will take him away!” Then Jesus simply says, “Mary.” How Mary didn’t know it was Jesus before, we’re not exactly sure. But the next verse says she turned to him. How would a gardener know her name? How many times had she heard Jesus call her name before – rescuing her from demons to teaching her about his

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 20:11–18.

Kingdom. And, in this moment when Jesus called her name, she knew who was speaking! She turns to him with joy, and she clings to Jesus. Wouldn't you do the same if you thought he was dead!

I can imagine almost a confused ecstasy! He's back from the dead! Then Jesus responds to Mary saying the following in verses 17-18: ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had said these things to her. ²

Is Jesus saying no one should hug him until he's in Heaven? No. The point is that Jesus is saying that she shouldn't *cling* to his physical existence with her. He still has more to do. He must ascend to Heaven and then give the gift that he purchased through his death on the cross: salvation to the world. So, Mary must let go and proclaim Jesus' resurrection to others. And she goes. She announced to the disciples that she has seen the Lord.

Ventura, ponder the love of Jesus here. Mary could have wondered if her hope was misplaced or if her hope had died. But Jesus came directly to her. She was the *first* person to see the resurrected Jesus! And, she's the first person to proclaim the good news of Jesus, with his resurrection as a part of it. In one sense, she's the first evangelist. And, she trusts Jesus, believing there's more to Christ's mission! Jesus forever changed her, and his resurrection motivated her to boldly tell others of Jesus. She didn't only experience freedom from demons. She experienced freedom and hope in Christ! As long as Jesus is living, she has hope. And, the same is true for us, Ventura! Mary's scenario teaches us our hope is alive. Now, move into Thomas and discover that our hope is secure.

2. Thomas' secure hope.

Let's read verses 24-29 together: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." ³

Thomas is mentioned on different occasions in different gospel accounts. But he's probably most well-known for this account. Which, honestly, I kind of feel bad for him about this one. Why don't we know him for his statement in John 11:16, where he said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." ⁴ Thomas said he was willing to die with Jesus! That's a powerful statement, especially because many of the disciples seemed to think that Jesus came to build the Kingdom and to set everything in place. Yet, Thomas seems to have a belief that he'll follow Jesus no matter what the cost – even if it doesn't make sense.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 20:17–18.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 20:24–29.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 11:16.

But, maybe his statement was just hyperbole because when it came true, his faith seemed to all but disappear. Can you relate? We all know that just because we feel strong in the faith in one moment, doesn't mean that strength of faith remains. Maybe that's you today. You once had strong faith. Now it's so weak – almost non-existent. The crucifixion of Jesus was shattering to many of Jesus' disciples, including Thomas. Look at this story. Before this incident, John tells us that Jesus appeared to the other disciples. He showed them his scars! But, for whatever reason, Thomas wasn't there. The disciples tell him about it, and Thomas says that unless he sees and touches the scars, he won't believe. Thomas seems to be in a very low spot. He won't even believe his own friends.

Maybe you can relate to Thomas. He says the *only* way he'll believe is if he sees! Clearly, Thomas ought to believe apart from physical sight. At one point in his life, he trusted Jesus no matter what. Why not now? To this, Jesus could have simply said, "Well then, I guess you're going to deny me. I'm not going to prove myself to you." But Jesus doesn't do this. Eight days after the previous meeting, the disciples are together. Thomas is with his friends. The doors are locked in the place. And somehow Jesus shows up in their midst. What must Thomas have thought and felt in that moment? Well, we're told.

Jesus comes into a locked room and proclaims peace. This is exactly what the disciples need to hear. This word for peace does not primarily mean "May you have fluttery feelings of peace inside of you." The word "peace" is talking about a reconciliation with God – no fear of judgment from God only welcome with God. Do you know that we as humans are born at war with God. We are rebels against the King because we are born wanting our own glory, our exaltation. We want to be at God's level. We reveal this in how we interact with the world. We want things to affirm and approve of *us* and many people who still believe in the existence of God define God's love in terms of whether or not he affirms humans – not whether or not humans should submit to and honor him. If your God must serve you, it's not God you serve, it's you. You need peace with God. You're a rebel. You face judgment unless you know Jesus' rescue. And Jesus says to the disciples "Peace to you," and Thomas is in this room, too.

Even though Thomas has been doubting and struggling with faithlessness, Jesus speaks peace to him! And to ensure Thomas knows this, Jesus turns directly towards him. Jesus doesn't come to reprimand Thomas. He comes to comfort Thomas. The risen Savior who has conquered sin by taking our sin on himself. You see, Jesus didn't die on the cross to condemn. He died to take condemnation for Thomas-like people. And, he rose from the dead in order that the message of his victory would be applied to real lives like Thomas, like us!

So, Jesus turns to Thomas and says, in verse 27, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."⁵ What's amazing here is that Jesus' resurrection body retains the scars of his sacrifice. Do you remember last week's sermon from Revelation 5? The Lion is the Lamb. The scars are proof of who he is. Oh Ventura, ponder this. Jesus' body was broken and torn so we could be completely healed. The Bible says someday we will receive resurrection bodies, like Jesus. However, the Bible indicates we won't have our scars from this life. But Jesus keeps them! Why? Because his scars reveal his victory, his accomplishment and his love towards us! In eternity future, those of us here who have turned from our sin and depended on Jesus for rescue will rejoice every moment in the cross. We will be in a New Heaven and New Earth because of his sacrifice. The resurrection proves his love and sacrifice is our salvation!

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 20:27.

As Jesus shows his scars to Thomas, he calls Thomas not to disbelieve, but to believe. The implication is that Thomas was reverting back to unbelief. What happens next is beautiful. We're not told that Thomas even touches Jesus. He may have. But either way, verse 28 makes a powerful statement of Thomas: ²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"⁶

This is a culminating story in the entire book of John. For those in discipleship groups, you probably especially recall that John starts his book by saying Jesus is the Word who was with God and the Word is God. Now we come towards the end of the book and Thomas, who was filled with unbelief here declares, from the heart, that Jesus is Lord and God! His Lord and his God. And because Jesus is Lord and God, his hope is steadfastly secure. He doesn't have a wavering hope that changes depending on the hardships of life or the trials or pains or joys and happy circumstances. He has a hope that is more secure than any foundation in this earth.

Can you imagine the joy in Thomas' heart as he makes this declaration? Jesus then says to Thomas in verse 29: Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.⁷ Jesus came to Thomas in the flesh to bless him. But Jesus speaks to the many who are blessed and who haven't seen. That would be people like us. Many in this room have believed the eye-witness testimonies of Jesus and his resurrection. And for us, Jesus says that we're blessed.

I can't help but wonder, though, if there are believers here whose trust in Jesus is wavering. Whatever the circumstances you've been going through, doubt is rising. Cling to the words of Jesus. Whether you feel like it or not, you are blessed in Jesus. Return back to the old, old true story of Jesus and listen to the eyewitnesses who were shocked and overjoyed to see Jesus *alive*. Your hope is steadfast in the midst of whatever seasons this life brings.

Thomas was radically affected by all of this. From a historical perspective, it's said that Thomas, as an apostle, ended up traveling the farthest to share Christ with the world. There's evidence that he made it all the way to India to preach the gospel. And he died for Jesus there. Thomas truly did die for Jesus. He did not count his earthly life dear to him because Jesus' death gave him life, and through his resurrection, Thomas was blessed and given peace, security, lasting hope, and eternal friendship with God. Do you know this hope? If you do, have you forgotten it? Turn back to the gracious Savior. I think we see with Thomas that **We're not saved by the strength of our faith, but by the strength of the One in whom we have faith.**

Finally, we go to a third story, and we discover a love-based hope.

3. Peter's Love-Based Hope.

Chapter 21:15-17, we read, "¹⁵When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." ⁸

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 20:28.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 20:29.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 21:15-17.

The scenario is that the disciples were out fishing and Jesus shows up on the shore. Jesus asks them to cook the fish. They're sitting on the shore, eating. And, keep in mind that up to this point, we don't have any record of Jesus speaking directly to Peter. It's important that Jesus does speak to Peter because Peter's story is one of outright denial against Jesus. Three times, Peter rejected Jesus during his trial and Jesus even looked at Peter when that rooster crowed after the third denial. And what will Jesus do to Peter? What does Jesus think of Peter? Sure, Jesus can forgive a Thomas, but what about a Peter?

Jesus begins with questions, asking Peter if he loves Jesus. Can you imagine how stinging that question would be? Peter's probably asked that question of himself a thousand times already. Amazingly, Peter responds by saying "yes." Jesus asks this three times, which emphasizes the seriousness of the question. Does Peter love Jesus? He then says, "You know all things and know that I love you." Listen carefully, I don't think Peter was saying he perfectly loved Jesus. He knew his guilt. But he knew his love (however weak it was). And it was weak because Peter went back to his former occupation of fishing. But Jesus restores Peter here. Feeding the sheep and lambs speaks of Peter's call to teach others about Jesus.

Can you imagine the freedom Peter is feeling. I'm reminded of when Jesus said in his earthly ministry that those who are forgiven much, love much. Peter is forgiven much, and the hope Jesus grants to Peter is all based in his love for Peter! At this point, Jesus predicts Peter's death: ¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me." ⁹

Peter is forever changed because he understood the great forgiveness that was extended to him. Jesus prophesies of how Peter is going to die, with his hands stretched out. That's what happens. Under Emperor Nero's reign, Peter and Paul are in the city of Rome ministering while Christians are being persecuted. Peter is then caught and taken to be crucified – and he did extend his arms out in crucifixion, but feeling unworthy to be crucified the same way as Jesus, he asked to be crucified upside down. What could change a person from denying Jesus and living in timidity to then sacrificially living his life all the way to martyrdom? Answer: Jesus. He really gives steadfast hope. He doesn't give a hope like this world. He gives living, secure, love-based hope.

Therefore, listen to the words of John in John 20: ³⁰ **Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;** ³¹ **but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.** ¹⁰ Do you hear the point of John's writing? Not simply so you can have hope in the things of this world, but so that you have eternal hope. And where is this living, secure, loved-based hope based? In Jesus himself! He himself is hope. Do you believe? Do you depend on the Savior who loves, empowers, died and rose again for sinners! God's love is great and eternal, and he loves you. If you don't know that love, you can know that because he sent his one and only Son to both die and rise again. Or, maybe you've strayed like Peter or Thomas, would you look to him again? He has words of love and grace to you.

The crucified Son rose from the dead – and, through faith in him, you can and do have the Living, Secure, Love-based Hope. His name is Jesus.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 21:18–19.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 20:30–31.