

Note: This is the sermon manuscript that Ben carried into the pulpit. Feel free to use it in any way to advance the kingdom of God.

**Easter 2010:
Alive Forever
John 20
Englewood Baptist Church
Sunday morning, April 4, 2010**

Why is there a world, and why is it covered with people? How you answer that question says everything about what you believe. Or let me phrase it like the philosophers: why is there something rather than nothing? Most people avoid that question by staying preoccupied with soccer games, and shoe shopping, and sharing thoughts online, and so forth. Our lives are a flurry of activity, so we never have to stop and deal with the difficult questions. But every once in a while, our stillness overcomes us like a heavy overcoat—maybe at a long traffic light or maybe under the quietness of your comforters in your bed—in those little moments of stillness, the question presses down upon our souls. “Why do I exist? Why I am alive?”

There are only two reasonable answers to that question. There are only two possible worldviews:

**Why Am I Alive?
Two Worldviews:**

1. I was created by accident.

According to this worldview, billions of year ago, the earth suddenly came into being. Not only did it “suddenly” come into being, but it appeared just right: especially designed for life to exist. There was the perfect...

- *Atmosphere.* The most ideal recipe of gases: 21% oxygen, 78% Nitrogen, 1% Carbon Dioxide. With this unusual blend of gases, vegetation was permitted to grow and air could fill the future lungs of creatures.
- *The size of the earth, perfect.* If the earth were small like Jupiter, any life form would be crushed by gravity. There is a small window of size for a planet to produce life. The Earth, accidentally, some say, fell in that range.
- *Then there is water.* The earth is covered and smothered like Waffle House Hashbrowns. Water is painted all over the globe. This is the only planet that we know of that has any significant amount of that liquid gold. Without water, we die. More importantly, without water, we never begin to live.
- *The Sun.* A giant burning ball in the sky that lies at the perfect distance from the planet. Any closer and we burn like a stick in the furnace. Any further, and we become popsicles. The Sun is just right.

Now these are just a few of the conditions. If I really wanted to bore you with science, I could speak of the earth’s rare magnetic field which shields us from deadly direct sun. I could speak of the ozone layer which protects life from ultraviolet rays. I could speak of the axis and rotation of

the earth which is precisely ideal for life to exist on Earth. Take all these conditions and multiply them together and the possibility for a life-giving planet:

.000000000000000072

That's 7 chances in 10 quadrillion, which is a thousand trillion.

The math suggest that the world we live in is a VERY special place. It is truly a garden among the desert of rocky barren planets. As one scientist says, the more we learn about the universe, the more the earth appears to be the extreme exception to the norm.

And so many millions of people have put their faith in the zero, zero, zero, zero, zero, zero...chance that the world is one big accident. And then they put their faith in the zero, zero, zero, zero, zero...point chance that a single celled organism ultimately produced a two eyed, two eared, two lobed, 4 chambered, double armed, double legged, 10 fingered, 10 toed person with a multilayered skin that reproduces itself, heals itself human being. That's all possible...I think. There is a scientific explanation for why you're sitting here breathing. That's one worldview, and one that dominates our culture.

But there is another answer to the question of life. Would you be interested? What if there was more than a scientific theory? What if there was a supernatural solution. What if..

2. I was created by a miracle of God.

Is there such a thing as a miracle? Is there more that lies behind your eyeballs than mere science?

In the book of John, chapter 20, one woman and a group of men see things with their eyes that leave them bewildered and confused. Their worldview comes into crises. They don't know how to process the data. 100 out of 100 people they have ever known have died and stayed dead. Everyone stays dead. But Mary rises early, and she goes to put the finishing touches on the corpse of Christ. She wanted to "pretty up" the pierced body of her friend. She didn't know how she would get that big boulder away from the hole. Surely, she figured she could sweet talk a soldier into showing some decency for the dead. But this was one problem she never had to solve. So many of our worries never play out, yet we spend hours stressing on the proper way to handle them.

Mary never had to whisper sweet nothings to a soldier. When she arrived at the tomb, the stone was rolled back. Like all human beings, her brain jumped to scientific solutions, logical explanations. That is, somebody stole him. And like a little sister tattle tailing on her brother, she runs to Peter and to John, and she barks out, "*They have taken the Lord, and we don't have a clue where they hid him.*" There must be some explanation for this.

And so, a footrace ensues. Peter gets beat bad and John arrives at the tomb first. By the way, I'll bet that was John's favorite part of this story. I'll bet he still reminds Peter of it today. He might have that verse framed in his office in his heavenly mansion in heaven. He smoked Peter in a

foot race, and this is what John saw as Peter was finishing his last leg of the course. V. 5, says, that he bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there, but he did not go in.

Then, finally, Peter shows up sucking wind, with a fast beating heart. He moves past John and actually walks inside that little funeral home to see what his friend had seen. V. 6...

So, like a criminal investigator, Peter is putting all these pieces together and saying to himself, "This puzzle doesn't fit." This can be no grave robbery. For no burial burglar would take time to remove the sticky, gluey strips of cloth that would have been cemented to his body. Besides, any grave robber would have chosen to hoist a mummy over his shoulder rather than the naked, bloody body of a criminal. And why were his clothes lying there like that? So undisturbed and neat? It appeared as if his flesh had passed through the linen. The scene of the crime didn't fit Mary's theory. John and Peter knew it.

And v.8 says that John stepped inside the tomb and something snapped in his heart, "He saw and he believed." Supernatural solution.

From there, John 20 tells us that Jesus provided much more than an empty tomb to prove his resurrection. He then makes a series of personal visits to plant the seed of the boldness in his disciples who would one day join the list of martyrs. But, first, he appears to a woman. And not just any woman, she is a woman with history, with a past. And Christ reinforces his mission to seek and to save those who have shameful things in their past. Jesus died for the nobodies...for the negligent parents, and unfaithful spouses, and underachieving employees, and murderers, and thieves, and self-righteous religious folk. He appeared to one of the chief sinners, Mary Magdalene, a woman with a shady past. He spoke to her first.

From there, Jesus makes a house call in vv.19-21, and walks through a locked door and into his huddle of disciples. Strangely, there is one absentee. His name is Thomas,

And so we read this account in v.24...

Two things I want to say today about Thomas.

The Truth About Thomas

1. Thomas missed "church" and missed a great blessing.

It says in v.24, that Thomas was absent on the day when the disciples were gathered together. We know this was Sunday, the Lord's Day when they were gathered for prayer and worship. Let's talk about this for a moment because there is great confusion among church people about the Sabbath Day in the Bible.

Sunday is not the Sabbath day. By definition, the Sabbath is the last day of the week, which is Saturday. After Jesus rose again, the disciples gathered on the first day of the week for worship. This was not intended to replace the Jewish Sabbath, which was filled with laws, rules and regulations no longer in effect. For example, the Jews argued vehemently about whether a

person could eat an egg laid on the Sabbath or break a dead twig off a rose bush. The cross introduced Jesus as the Sabbath rest that man is now to enter into. We rest in a Savior, not in a Saturday.

So you and I are not bound by Sabbath laws and we can cut grass and sweep out a garage on a Saturday morning. However, while the first believers did set aside Sabbath legalism, they did choose to retain the rhythm of rest laid out in Genesis. They took one day a week, and they set aside for refreshment and worship. Before the law was ever given, the Bible says in Genesis that God chose to rest after six days of work. He did not need to take a break. He has no physical body that needs food and sleep. So why did he rest? He rested for your sake.

Jesus taught in the New Testament that the day of rest was a gracious gift of God, for the benefit of man. Who do we think we are that we skip rest and assume that we can remain spiritually and physically healthy on our own? Do we know better than God? God designed your soul to run for 6 and rest for 1. You need spiritual refueling.

And the disciples, even on that first Easter morning, chose to gather and pray and worship.

For some reason, Thomas missed that worship service. We don't know why. Perhaps he was under the weather and feeling flu-like. Perhaps he stayed up too late on Saturday. Maybe he just didn't feel like putting up with Peter's mouth. We don't know why he was not there, but we know that he missed a majestic moment with God.

Do you know what the name Thomas means? It means "twin" and I believe that many people play the role of his twin today. They are professing believers, but they miss out on these God moments every week because they do not make the sacrifice to assemble with the believers. They are not where God would have them to be.

And I want you to take special notice of v.26. It tells us this: "*A week later his disciples were in the house again...and Jesus came and stood among them.*" Jesus didn't come the next day, or three days later, he came a week later, when the believers had gathered together. The Lord loves the sacred assembly of his people and he loves to pop in. Of course, in this age, he has sent his Spirit, who fills the room of praising people. It's inspiring. So let this Easter be the start of a new rhythm in your life. Be with the believers in weekly worship. You don't want to miss the Lord.

#2, I want you to see this about Thomas...

2. Thomas was given a second chance to believe.

Just look at the cold-hearted decree in v.25, Thomas says, "*I will NOT believe it.*" What astounds me is that Jesus doesn't give up on such a stubborn soul. Thomas' 10 closest friends were jumping for joy that entire week because Jesus had passed through a door, in the flesh, and paid them a visit. You would think that Thomas would give his brothers the benefit of the doubt, but instead, he bows up and insists: "Unless I plug this finger inside those hole , I will not believe."

By the way, if the Lord had consulted me, I would say, “Wash your hands of him, and pay attention to the people who have ears to hear.” But Jesus doesn’t do that. He delights in giving grace and offering second chances to people. You might be one of them.

So v.26 says, “Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Shalom.” Peace be with you. And then he singles out the skeptic and says, “Put your finger here.” “Reach out your hand and put it here.” And then he commands, “Stop doubting and believe.” Another translation says: “Don’t be an unbeliever. Be a believer.”

Thomas had received the witness of the apostles and he would not believe. And church, what do you think this is? The New Testament is the written witness of the apostles, and what do you think that the Risen Lord says to every Thomas today? “Stop the unbelief. Show yourself to be a believer.”

For all of you with scientific minds, let me say that I am in your tribe. I was trained to think scientifically in college. For four years, I lived in a laboratory and attempted to prove or disprove hypothesis. I have a degree in science and I understand its power and purpose. I am no enemy of scientific reason. However, I say to you all Christianity can survive your careful scrutiny. Men with minds greater than yours have attempted to explain it away. I invite you to study the evidence for the resurrection of Christ. You will find...

These three facts are undisputed in history books. As accepted as the events of World War 1 or existence of George Washington. These three things happened:

Three Undisputed Historical Facts Concerning the Resurrection

- 1. The tomb in which Jesus was buried was discovered empty on the Sunday following the crucifixion.**
- 2. Jesus' disciples had real experiences with one whom they believed was the risen Christ.**
- 3. As a result of the preaching of these disciples, the Christian church grew explosively and has not stopped growing to this day.**

Now, those three truths are undisputed by historians. However, those who have tried to debunk Christianity have constructed three main arguments:

Three Main Arguments to Disprove the Resurrection

- 1. The Swoon Theory:** Jesus did not really die on the cross. Whoever checked his pulse was a novice. Jesus survived that the swoons, and the Romans soldiers made a medical mistake when they declared him dead. He was laid unconscious in a tomb, but resuscitated, removed the stone, snuck by the guards, and appeared to his disciples.

Let me give you several reasons why this doesn't work. First, no one ever survived crucifixions. This was the most brutal form of execution, well practiced by the Romans. They knew what they were doing.

Second, even if Jesus did make it through the crucifixion alive, Jesus would not have been in a fit state to escape the tomb and the soldiers. This was a monstrous rock, and well-armed guards.

Three, even if Jesus did make it through the crucifixion alive and then rolled back the stone, and then snuck past the guards, he would have appeared to the disciples in such an appalling state that no one would assume he was glorified, but that he was a mere man. He would have looked more like a person drug behind a truck than a man who had put on a perfect body. All of these reasons rule out the swoon theory.

It doesn't work.

2. **The Hallucination Theory:** This idea states that Jesus' disciples were so emotionally fraught by seeing their leader executed that they imagined him coming back. Just like people today swear to have Elvis sightings.

Let me tell you why this doesn't work. First, Jesus appeared to people who weren't his disciples. In fact, some people were saved because they had an encounter with the risen Christ. Second, hallucinations happen with individuals. They don't happen in groups. Those witnesses weren't having a happy dream. They were seeing a man raised from the dead.

Hallucination just doesn't explain this away.

3. **The Conspiracy Theory:** According to this line of thinking, there were no appearances of Jesus, hallucinatory or real. It was all a big tale of fiction, and this explains the entire ordeal, right?

Wrong. In my estimation, this is the most desperate attempt to explain away the miracle. For this were all a man-made myth, then why didn't the Romans just produce the body and end the whole ordeal? Why did the church grow so explosively for the days, months, and years following that first Easter, if in fact it was all just a sham? And why did the disciples go to the stake to be burned or the cross to be hung for the sake of a dead, lying preacher? Peter denied Jesus three times before died, and yet post resurrection, Peter became a rock for the church, and gave his life for the church, because he had seen the living, breathing Son of God sailing through the clouds on his way back to heaven. He heard the angels say, "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

And they left that place and they soon peppered the landscape with the Jesus saves message, and sinner became saints. The gates of hell have not been able to hold back the movement begun by Jesus. He is alive.

None of these natural explanations will do. So what are we left with? We are left with a supernatural solution. In science, seeing is believing. In Christ, believing is seeing. And so I say to you, twins of Thomas, stop with the unbelieving, and believe.

For blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.