The Grace of Evidence

## A Savior of Grace

## By Steve Viars

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### Faith Church

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Hey, can you think of anybody in your life who has gone the extra mile in order to help you in some way? I imagine we all have a person, probably several people, who would fit into that category. Someone who didn't just do the bare minimum, they didn't just do what was absolutely required, they went beyond the call of duty in order to help you, in order to serve you in your journey. A lot of us when we think about that we think of a teacher who put all of the energy and the creativity he or she possibly could into helping you understand a particular subject. Do you remember that time? You were just stuck. You just couldn't get that one and that teacher came along and did whatever was necessary and now you look back at that person. Don't we all have a favorite teacher just like that? You look back at that person with profound gratitude and maybe even amazement because you were a little stubborn. Amazement that they went the extra mile for you. Others probably think of a mentor at work, someone who really took an interest in you and gave you all sorts of help, all sorts of direction, just when you were starting out. Now you say, "I'm not even sure where I would even be from a career perspective if it wasn't for that person who went the extra mile for me."

We've experience that as a family with our son Andrew's Tippy Stars softball team. Several years ago, a couple of families were having trouble finding a suitable baseball or softball program for their children with various disabilities so they just started a program to address that need. They call it the Tippy Stars. That in and of itself exemplifies the principle I'm trying to articulate here: they went the extra mile. They didn't just sit around and complain about what wasn't available, they saw a need and they figured out a way to meet it.

The program is really unique in a lot of different ways but one of them is that they have linked up with all sorts of other teams in our community so when we play a game, the way it works is there is another baseball team or softball team from one of the public schools or the Christian schools or some other private school or even a league in our town, but just another team with players that don't have disabilities. So that team comes together on a given night and they're actually matched up one-on-one with a Tippy Star. They are going to become the aid for that child with disabilities on that particular night. Then we take the group like that and we divide it in half and we essentially play one another. That way young people with disabilities get to build friendships with other young people in our town and other young people in our town gain experience in loving and serving and working with those who have various disabilities.

Another strength is that because this program has been going on now for several years, some of these relationships, they're really solid and delightful. In fact now, some of the kids jokingly fight over who gets to work with my son, the Bear, and you love that because they've done it now for several years and so they'll get to the field, "I want to be with the Bear! I want to be with the Bear!" Generally speaking, I also stay with him just to be sure everything is okay but, you know when your son is getting old when you experience what we experienced recently where one night there were 2 girls from his school who wanted him, one on each side, one on the other and he's only got 2 arms so he says to me, "Dad, I don't need you tonight. I'll be with the ladies." Yeah. Don't be clapping for that little sinner. They even had the Purdue women's basketball team come out one night and play with them and this picture was taken just before my son, Andrew, that's right, the preacher's kid, starts beat boxing for them. They circled around and started dancing with him, him in the center. I have a video of that but I'm not going to desecrate the Lord's house with it. Going the extra mile.

You probably noticed even in these pictures, I mean, they go the extra mile by having their jerseys really sharp. It's not like, "Well, we're going to do it with people with disabilities so we're going to do it second rate." No way. The hats, the jerseys, everything is sharp. They even now have an arrangement with the Colt World Series so when we have teams that come literally from around the world to Lafayette to play in that particular tournament, during the halftime of one of the games or one of the intermissions during one of the games, they actually match up kids from around the world with the Tippy Stars and they play a game right there at the stadium and then afterward they just shower these young people from Tippy Stars with all sorts of gifts. You just love it, going the extra mile.

Something else I really like is that the coach just goes out of his way to get to know the tendencies of every one of these players and they are all dramatically unique and then does whatever he has to do to adjust, to tailor the game in order to make it best for them to be successful. There are well over 50 players now so they actually have had to divide the group up into 8 different teams. The coach and his wife still know every player by name but, more than that, this coach knows what it takes for each one of these players to hit the ball. For example, for our son Andrew who is blind, he has a special ball that is red because Andrew we think can see red on most days a little bit better than he can see anything else so the coach always stops the game when the Bear gets up to the plate, we've got to have the special Bear ball out because he wants to be sure that he's tailoring that game, going the extra mile to make it easiest for my son to succeed. Then, a lot of these children, they can't swing a bat. At best, they can get a bat out in front of them at all kinds of incredible angles and what I love about this coach is, he has learned the tendency of each one of the players and he tailors his pitch to actually hit the bat. It's not a matter of the bat swinging and hitting the ball. They can't do that many times, it's a matter of the coach knowing the tendencies of the player so well that he actually pitches the ball to hit their bat.

We're actually going to have another season this summer. You can go online later on in the spring and see their schedule. We'd love to have you come out. It's marvelous. But I promise you this: you would be delighted if you watched it unfold because you saw somebody going the extra mile in order to serve these young people and it's dripping with grace. It's absolutely dripping with grace.

Here's what I want to suggest this morning: God often treats people in exactly the same way. Did you know that? God often treats people in exactly the same way and you can find examples of that occurring even on Easter Sunday. That's right. With that in mind, turn in your Bible to John 20. That's on page 90 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

Our theme this year is "Finding Grace." We are having a great time just thinking about this marvelous concept in the word of God and we're focusing in on this theme verse. I hope many of you have memorized it by now, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace." Have you needed any of that this week? And is that where you turned? "To the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need." Well, during Easter, we're focusing on these last days of Jesus Christ on earth in the Gospel of John and we're talking about how Christ is our Savior of grace. That's what he is, our Savior of grace. Several weeks ago we saw the grace of endurance where Jesus allowed himself to be beaten and mocked and scourged and tried. Then as Peter would later explain, while being reviled, he didn't revile in return. While suffering, he uttered no threats. My, oh my. But kept entrusting himself to him who judges righteously. That's the grace of endurance.

Then we saw the grace of substitution whereas Jesus was dying physically, while that was horrendous, that was not the worst aspect of what was occurring because he was bearing the weight and penalty of our sin. We believe in the substitutionary atonement of Christ. Paul would later say it like this, "For you know the grace," there it is, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor." Why? "So that you through his poverty might become rich." John, by the way, when we were talking about that particular event, even added this marvelous detail about how even from the cross he could have been reviling, you spend your time like that. He could have been threatening, you'd want to spend your time like that. He spent his time from the cross being sure that his mother was cared for. Remember that? Even while he was dying, "Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother." That's the grace of substitution.

Last week we saw the grace of transformation. It was fascinating to watch Jesus respond to individuals who were trying to come to grips with the fulfilled promise that he really was alive. We saw some women learn that the tomb was empty. They believed, then they come and report it back to the men. What did those guys do? Not so well. In fact, they said to the women, "What you are saying is nonsense." That's what Peter and John said. To use the metaphor from the recent worldwide dress gate controversy, I mentioned this last week: they decided in their minds that the dress was white and gold and they were not going to be argued off of that until they went and found the tomb empty and Jesus' grave clothes still in the tomb. Explain that? And the face cloth not lying with the linen wrappings but actually folded up in a place by itself. What was happening? They're being transformed by grace. Every one of those details: grace, grace, grace, grace, grace. Transformed by grace.

Then Jesus appears directly to Mary Magdalene. Do you remember that? Did she get it right off the bat? No, she thought he was the gardener. In fact, she got a little bit snarky with him, do you remember that? "Sir, if you've taken his body, please tell me where you left it." Note to self: when you're going to talk to the resurrected Jesus, you might not want to be snarky about it. But what did Jesus do? He responded to her with incredible transforming grace by speaking one word which happened to be her name, "Mary." Grace on top of grace on top of grace.

Well, this morning we're going to work through the final verses in chapter 20 and we're going to talk about the grace of evidence because it is time for us to check in on a man named, who? Thomas. Thomas. Now listen: I love you and we have to make a deal. Are you ready to make a deal with me? I will give you this sermon, as if that's some great gift, if you'll promise me that sometime today you'll go to YouTube and you'll type in these words "Ralph Stanley - I Am The Man, Thomas," because I'm fairly certain I'm the only person in this room who has a relative, a Grammy award-winning relative, who has actually recorded a song about this event and that would be my relative, kind of distant, Ralph Stanley, who recorded the great bluegrass song "I Am The Man, Thomas." I am not going to play it for you today because some of you are not as cultured at would not appreciate it and that would offend me but you need to know that in the back of my mind while I'm giving this sermon, I have that song running through my brain. "I am the man, Thomas," well, anyway, here we go. Here we go.

John 20, beginning in verse 19, "So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week," so we're still on Easter Sunday, "So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week and when the doors were shut," notice that, "where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst," how did he do that? "And said to them, 'Peace be with you.' And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. So," curiously, "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If,'" notice this, "'If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.' But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.'" Wow. Wow, Thomas. "After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came," uh-oh, Thomas is about to get his comeuppance, "the doors having been shut," just like they were a week ago, "and stood in their midst and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side,'" if that's what you need to do, going the extra mile. "'Do not be unbelieving, but believing.' Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.' Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

Do you think it's fair to say that Christ went the extra mile with Thomas? Do you think the Lord has ever done that with you? Do you think the Lord might even be doing that with you right now? Do you think there might be some ways that God might be wanting you to do that with others? Hmm, let's talk about the grace of evidence and look for 3 ways God's grace goes the extra mile, friends.

Here's one way: it's through fulfilled prophecy. Here's what I'd like to do for a moment, I'd like to back up contextually and think about this principle in the broad sweep of the Scripture because you probably noticed this: John on several different occasions throughout this passage has said about a particular detail, "Well, that happened to fulfill the Scripture. That happened to fulfill the Scripture." The assumption is that Thomas and others would have had that knowledge of the Old Testament and that their hearts would have come alive because of the evidence. So John tells us about that, "This was to fulfill the Scriptures." He wants us to marvel at the way prophecies that were made hundreds of years before they occurred are coming true in startling detail. Every one of those fulfilled prophecies was an evidence of grace. That's what it was, making it easier for us to avoid the way of Thomas and instead to choose to believe in Christ.

What are some of those examples? There's an excellent book that was written several years ago called "The Heart of the Cross." I would strongly encourage you to secure and read this book if you never have before. It's written by James Montgomery Boice, who for many years was the pastor at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. He was the leader of the Chicago conferences on inerrancy and he took a tremendous amount of ridicule for people who did not like the word of God and who did not like freedom to believe the word of God and James Montgomery Boice was a fabulous pastor in Philadelphia, interestingly enough. He also had an associate named Philip Graham Ryken. Boice died very suddenly of cancer several years ago. Ryken became the senior pastor at Tenth Presbyterian and is now the President of Wheaton College and is just doing a fabulous job there. But they wrote this book, "The Heart of the Cross," and in that book they gave a whole series of Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled during the last days of Christ on earth. Just think about this and think about one would be a lot but Jesus is going the extra mile and going the extra mile and going the extra mile. How is that true?

Well, you have the Old Testament promise that the Savior would be betrayed by an intimate friend. How strange is that? Did that happen? No doubt about that: Jesus was betrayed by a kiss of Judas.

Or this: the Old Testament promise that the Savior would be totally innocent. Interesting. Confirmed by the mouth of an unbelieving man, "I find no basis for a charge against him." Interesting how God allowed that particular Old Testament prophecy to be precisely fulfilled.

The Old Testament promise that the Savior would be mocked. Where have you heard that? At the time the, you say, "How could the...? Why would the Messiah be mocked?" We know the answer to that, don't we? As we watched Jesus blindfolded, spat upon, insulted, slapped around, crowned with thorns in precise fulfillment. It had to happen that way so the Scripture would be fulfilled.

The Old Testament promise that the Savior would be counted as a criminal. Again, what in the world would that mean? And I would also encourage you, in fact, you probably ought to do this before you listen to Ralph's song, read Isaiah 53. What a fabulous passage in the Old Testament, for sure, but how could that happen? But we know how it could happen, huh? Jesus was crucified with 2 criminals, one on his right and the other on his left.

By the way, if you're wondering why is it that some people have such allegiance to the word of God? These are the reasons why and we're not wanting to force that on somebody else. We have zero interest on forcing that on somebody else but we choose to live this way ourselves and we believe we ought to have the freedom to live this way ourselves without somebody else coercing us to sin. You say, "Well, you're just stubborn." It's not a matter of being stubborn, it's a matter of believing in the fidelity of the word and God has given us plenty of reasons to believe. I don't know any other person or any other book making prophecies like this, do you?

The Old Testament promise that the Savior would have his hands and his feet, how could that happen? Well, it did, didn't it? Nails driven through his hands and his feet, coming prominently into this particular text, by the way.

The Old Testament promise that wicked men would gamble. I mean, can you imagine reading that in the Psalm. "What? What? What?" We saw that a couple of weeks ago. The soldiers crucifying Christ dividing up his clothes in order that the Scripture... Before you let somebody take that Bible out of your hand or force you to live in a way that is inconsistent with it, you might want to decide your level of commitment to your Bible. The soldiers who crucified Christ divided up his clothes.

The Old Testament promise that the Savior would be God forsaken. How could that be? Because he was dying for our sin. God the Father turned his back on his own Son, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

The Old Testament promise that his bones would not be broken which is why it is so important that Jesus gave up his spirit. "Therefore the soldiers who were trained in knowing, determined that he was already dead." His body, his bones did not need to be broken.

The Old Testament promise that he would be buried in a rich man's tomb. Isaiah makes that very, very clear. That was exactly fulfilled when Christ was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

Even small details. The Old Testament promise that the Savior would experience great thirst. Why? Why? Well, we know why, because he was dying on the cross. "And Jesus said to fulfill the Scripture, 'I am thirsty.'"

Friends, that's called going the extra mile. In fact, I hope as I go through that list that just takes your breath away. If that doesn't take your breath away, I would check my pulse but what's happening is God is going the extra mile to make it as easy as possible to believe. And I really think that one of the takeaways for each one of us from this message and from this series is a profound sense of gratitude for the lengths to which God went in order to bring us to a point of repentance and belief. Let's face it, one fulfilled prophecy would be amazing. If you've got somebody making a prophecy a thousand years before it occurred or 700 years before it occurred, one fulfilled prophecy would be amazing but we've been given evidence on top of evidence on top of evidence which is why John said at the beginning of his book, "We saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace, full of truth. For of His fullness we have all received and grace on top of grace on top of grace."

This is what explains the confidence and authority that was given the followers of Christ. Did you see that in verse 23? "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them." Really? On the basis of the Scripture. "If you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." And I realize that promise has been misused in all sorts of ways over the centuries but the point is: all of this fulfilled prophecy can give us a level of confidence that as we study and apply the word of God, we can make objective determinations about the nature of sin for ourselves. We have zero interest in judging the world but we certainly want to have the freedom to apply the word of God for ourselves and to determine what is sinful for us and to determine what constitutes forgiveness for us. And there's a level of confidence, there is a level of authority because of this fulfilled prophecy, God going beyond the call of duty over and over and over for us.

Think about how this impacts our church family in the next week. Going the extra mile. We'll start with Arvid Olsen and Ken Sherwin, 2 very unique gifts from God to this church. That really is true. Incredibly gifted by God when it comes to design and construction of theatrical sets. Then layer on Johnny C. who is serving as the director of the Passion Play this year. Then all the actors. All the musicians. All the choir members. All the set folks. The sound and lighting. Everything that goes into that presentation. And you can write over that entire event the words "Going the extra mile." Why? What would motivate people to live that way? Well, it's because they have been impacted by a God who did exactly the same thing for them. Going to incredible lengths both to secure their salvation and to give them great confidence in the biblical message of the Gospel and now they're choosing to be like their God, not to do things halfway but with all of their creativity and all of their energy and all of their giftedness and in some cases to the point of near exhaustion. Why? To go the extra mile to make the good news of Jesus Christ as attainable and understandable to as many people in our community as possible. And what I’m suggesting to us this morning is: every minute spent like that is a minute spent being like their God.

Now, let's bring this into the verses that we studied in John 20. Thomas not only has what the Old Testament has prophesied about the Messiah but he also has this report of the resurrected Christ appearing to his friends which offers undeniable evidence. Of course, think about this from Thomas' perspective you have everything that happened already on Easter Sunday morning so we have the angels' various appearances, we have the empty tomb, we have the grave clothes, we have the folded face cloth, we have the appearance of Christ himself to Mary Magdalene. What is that? Jesus going the extra mile and going the extra mile and going the extra mile to make it easiest for them to believe.

Then you have his visit to the disciples without Thomas. What does this text reveal to us about this? Well, it's Easter Sunday evening now filled with grace of more evidence like his entrance. They've shut and locked the door. Well, why in the world would the disciples on Easter Sunday night have shut and locked the door? The answer is: if Christ's enemies already killed him and now his body is missing, they have every reason to believe they're next, right? So let's not fault the disciples for locking the door. If I would have been there, I would've nailed it shut with 16 penny nails because, and let's be straight about what it is that we're signing up for here: what did Jesus say to his followers before he went to the cross? "Look, they're going to hate you because they hated me." So if you think, "You know, I'm going to be a Christian and I’m just going to be nice and everybody is going to love me," seriously? That is not anything like what you signed up for and I’m not saying we ought to look for fights, I’m not saying we ought to look for reasons for people to want to hate us more but I’m just simply saying: if you live for God for yourself, if you choose to let this word that I’m talking to you about this morning be your guide and in a country like this, you ask for the religious freedom not to have somebody impose their view on you in a way that would cause you to sin against your own biblically informed conscience, there is going to be a storm. "They hate you because they hated me."

So let's not complain about the fact that they're hunkered down in this room with the door shut and the door locked but Jesus appeared. How did he do that? Well, now he has a resurrected body. And then what does he say to them twice? He says, "Peace be to you." What does that tell you? He knows exactly what they're feeling. He does everything possible just to calm their troubled hearts.

Then there's the display. "And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord." Now remember this: we saw last week at the beginning of this same day when Peter and John heard the report that he was alive, what happened? They considered it to be nonsense. Can you imagine what it would be like for Jesus to allow you to look at the wounds in his hands and his side anyway on the same day you said that? It's going the extra mile. It's doing everything possible to help you believe.

Then there's this incredible provision, "And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit,'" which was the precursor to what would happen to them 50 days later on the day of, what? On the day of Pentecost. But I’m suggesting every step in this process, it's just laden with grace to help them believe and then be prepared for the mission that he has for them.

Theologian Charles Hodge summarized all of this in some language that's a little bit outdated but you'll get the point. "As the resurrection of Christ is an historical fact," and that's what it is. Nobody is asking anybody to believe in a fairytale, it's an historical fact, "it is to be proved by historical evidence. The apostle therefore appeals to the testimony of competent witnesses. To render such testimony irresistible, it's necessary that, 1. The fact to be proved should be of a nature to admit of being certainly known. 2. That adequate opportunity be afforded to the witnesses to ascertain its nature and to be satisfied of its verity. 3. That the witnesses be of sound mind and discretion. 4. That they be men of integrity." Then Hodge goes on to say this, "If these conditions be fulfilled, human testimony establishes the truth of a fact beyond reasonable doubt." We believe that in this culture to this day. "If, however, in addition to these grounds of confidence the witnesses give their testimony at the expense of great personal sacrifice or confirm it with their blood, it is insanity and wickedness to doubt it. All these considerations concur in proof of the resurrection of Christ and render it the best authenticated event in the history of the world." Why? Because, friends, we serve a Savior of grace who will go the extra mile to make it easiest for you to believe.

Well, what happens next? Of course, they're going to tell Thomas. They're going to find Thomas and they're going to tell Thomas. We know Judas is gone, if you're just counting here. Judas is gone because he has taken his life and then for some unspecified reason the Scripture says, "But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But Thomas said to them, 'Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.'" I wonder what Jesus is going to do with a guy like that, huh? Think about it: he's had the grace of fulfilled prophecy, remember all those we ticked down? He's had the grace of fulfilled prophecy, he's had the grace of undeniable evidence from at least 10 eyewitnesses, men that he has hung out with for the last 3 years; he knows they're not pushovers. So now what is he going to get for this brazen statement of unbelief? He's going to get a tender interaction with a Savior who is full of grace.

So what we read is he gets patient repetition. Patient repetition. Now, what do we actually know about Thomas before John 20? What do we know about him? Well, we assume he had a twin. Why would we assume that Thomas had a twin? Because the name Didymus means twin. That might help you on a Trivial Pursuit contest someday. The name Didymus means twin so the reason, in fact, that was his name. They called him Twin. I don't think you'd call a guy Twin unless he had a twin but who am I to judge? Anyway, we know that. He was called Didymus. He does come up in several important places in the Gospels prior to John 20, all of which give us the impression that he was the pessimist of the group, the one who was prone to seeing the glass half empty, prone to doubt, prone to discouragement. In fact, John MacArthur said it like this, "He was the eternal pessimist, a melancholy person who had the uncanny knack for finding the cloud in every silver lining."

Now, why would we say that? Here are a couple of places where Thomas comes up before John 20. One was at the raising of Lazarus. Do you remember this story? It's in John 11 and Jesus said to them, "So Jesus then said to them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead,

and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him.'" Who speaks up next? It was Thomas. Do you remember what Thomas said? Fascinating statement, "Therefore Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, so that we may die with Him.'" I need the Eeyore voice. Do you know what I mean? I don't really have the Eeyore, you need the Eeyore voice for that. "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him," which, I suppose, on one hand you're glad he's willing to give his life for Christ but that's not what Jesus said was going to happen and in retrospect that's certainly not what occurred but that's what the pessimist would say.

Or, just a few days ago in the upper room Jesus made a marvelous pronouncement to them, John 14, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you," Christ proclaimed. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going." Someone spoke up at that point, who was it? It's our man Thomas and here is the best thing he could conjure up after that news, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" There again, there's a lot of different ways to respond to the news that Jesus is going to prepare a place for you like how about, "Yahoo! Thank you so much! I can't wait to get there!" But he comes up with the most pessimistic response possible.

Now, fast-forward all that to John 20. You have to wonder why wasn't he with the group originally anyway? And you understand, sometimes the best reading of the Bible is between the lines. I mean, we have to be very careful because we don't know for sure but I'll tell you, if you read through the entire Gospel of John and you're not yet convinced that we worship a Savior of grace, all of that is shattered when we get to this event. Think about Jesus' grace to Thomas. Based on the way the days were reckoned, it says 8 days, it's probably the next Sunday. I guess that's not totally important if you see that differently but we think it's probably the next Sunday and for Thomas' benefit, the Lord repeats the scene exactly the way it occurred before. "After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them." Now, what's different? "Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach here,'" if that's what you need to do, reach here, "'with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.'" Do you realize that means Jesus knew exactly what Thomas has said even though he wasn't physically there. There's a little something to think about. It might make you happy, it might make you sad.

Then he makes this incredible offer, "Thomas, you can touch the wounds if you want to." Remember, textually, the previous Sunday he said to the other disciples, he showed them the wounds but here's another example of Jesus going the extra mile, huh? "Thomas, do you want to? Do you feel like you need to touch them because if that's what you want to do, then go ahead and do it." Do you notice, by the way, that the Scripture is silent on whether or not Thomas actually took Jesus up on that offer. Do you know that? It's not in the text so you just have to ask yourself, "I wonder if he did?" What do you think? Do you think he did? No way to know. That might be one of those, "I need to write that down so that I can ask Thomas when I get to heaven," questions.

But we do know this: that was the end of the doubts, huh? Thomas says in verse 28, "My Lord and my God!" What a marvelous testimony of faith. It was a little slow coming, I get that, but when he got there, he got there well. And what was the Lord's response? Interesting, "Because you have seen Me, have you believe? Blessed are they," here is you and me, "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." In other words, extra credit for those who are going to come after you who will choose to believe even though they can't see. It reminds us of Hebrews 11, doesn't it? "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen for by it the men of old gained approval."

Well, what are some of the takeaways for people like you and me from this great text? Well, it kind of depends on the spiritual condition that you are bringing into the room so let's think about it from several different perspectives. What about if you've not yet placed your faith and trust in Christ? Boy, I'm glad you're here. You know, I say that all the time. This place, we're wide open for anybody who wants to come and hear the word of God, right? We don't turn anybody away. We're glad you're here but if you have never trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, I would encourage you to embrace the blessing that comes from believing the evidence you already have and you don't need to be able to touch the wounds yourself if you have eyewitnesses who saw someone else given that privilege. And the truth of the matter is: God has already gone the extra mile, hasn't he? In both the amount of evidence he has given every one of us and the amount of time he has given us to repent and believe. Friend, if you've not yet done that, I would encourage you on Palm Sunday, what a great day to become a follower of Christ and I would encourage you to do that.

You know, that's what really matters around here. Every so often we have to get in a dustup here, that's the 88th note on our piano, don't play it much and don't really like it a whole lot but the center of the piano is the good news of Jesus Christ and our desire to live it for ourselves and to proclaim it for anyone who's interested in hearing. And I'm so glad to tell you that for some reason, God has given us a number of people, almost week after week this year, of men and women who have placed their faith and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. And if you've not yet done that, look Thomas, you don't want me to break out into Ralph Stanley's song, do you? For our Faith West friends, my son just cried out, "No!" "I don't need you tonight, dad, I’ll be with the ladies." If you've not yet trusted Christ, we want to encourage you to do that.

What about for those who have trusted the Lord? You know, I would encourage you to think about the different people that God has placed in your life who were so patient with you as they continued to live Christ in front of you even though you were a little bit stubborn. Have you got anybody on that list? In fact, when I was in the first service, I was looking at my momma when I said that. My, oh my. I was shy, I was stubborn, I was a bunch of bad things and my momma just kept going the extra mile and kept going the extra mile of living Christ and proclaiming Christ. I'm so thankful for people who went the extra mile for me.

This week I have the opportunity to preach in chapel at Cedarville University and I’m going to get to hang out with one of my friends from high school I have not seen in a long, long time. But even in high school, there were a group of kids from the Christian school and from our churches who just pursued the fire out of me. I don't know why. They weren't getting anything out of it but they just went the extra mile. They would chase me down. They wanted me to come to youth group activities, they wanted me to come to Christ and now I’m going to have the opportunity, he works for Score International. He does a lot of work now in the Dominican Republic, interestingly enough. And one of the things I’m planning to do is just to thank him and praise God for his life even as a teenager who went the extra mile and went the extra mile and went the extra mile for me.

I would also say this: I realize there are a lot of people in our church who in all sorts of areas of your life you just go the extra mile. You're like God when you do that. I've watched a number of persons in this church care for their elderly parents and even when their elderly parents got to the place where they couldn't recognize them and I’ve watched people from this church care for mom or care for dad in incredibly compassionate ways. Do you realize that when you were doing that you were being like your God?

I've watched mommas do that with their kids. In fact, I was in an airport the other day and I was just sitting there waiting for the plane reading a book and there was a young mom sitting next to me and she had a little toddler and that guy was zooming, I was getting tired just watching the little guy and here's this sweet mom following him around and spending time with him and enjoying him. At some point I even asked, "How long has he been walking?" She said, "Two months." And it wasn't like, "Two months, yahoo!" It was, "Two months." But there's that mom just faithfully...and there are a lot of people. We could talk about that in all sorts of ways of people who go the extra mile. You do that in your work. You do that in your neighborhood. You do that in all sorts of ways. Do you recognize that when you do that you are being like your God?

One last thing for Christians: what about the way you relate to and minister to others? Do you know what? You might have some Thomases in your life right now. They are a little brazen with you because they're not loving Jesus quite yet, huh? I hope you're going to love on them. I hope you're going to go the extra mile for them. That's why we're encouraging you, invite someone to the Passion Play. You never know when the next Thomas is going to repent, do you know that? That's why we're encouraging you to invite your friends to church because next Sunday, Lord willing, we're going to study one of my favorite passages in all the Bible, John 21, about the grace of forgiveness. Bring your friends to come with you. I would encourage you to tell your friends about the outreach series we have after Easter on the family. Great, great opportunities. And if you would say, "But you don't know, that guy would never become a Christian. He would never believe." I'm not much of a poetry guy but my wife found this on Facebook this week and she shared it with me. Let me close our service with this,

"I was shocked, confused, bewildered as I entered Heaven's door,   
Not by the beauty of it all, nor the lights or its decor.

"But it was the folks in Heaven who made me sputter and gasp-   
The thieves, the liars, the sinners, the alcoholics and the trash.

"There stood the kid from seventh grade who swiped my lunch money twice.   
Next to him was my old neighbor who never said anything nice.

"Bob, who I always thought was rotting away in hell,   
Was sitting pretty on cloud nine, looking incredibly well.

"I nudged Jesus, 'What's the deal? I would love to hear your take.   
How'd all these sinners get up here? God must've made a mistake.  
  
"'And why's everyone so quiet, so somber - give me a clue.'   
'Hush, child,' He said, 'they're all in shock. No one thought they'd be seeing you.'"

Let us stand together for prayer, shall we?

*Father in heaven, we thank you for your grace. Lord, thank you for so much evidence and thank you for going the extra mile, giving us time to decide. Lord, I pray that we would be like that with others in our lives. We ask in Christ's name. Amen.*