

Jesus Prepares His Disciples

Summary and Goal

In the previous session, we discussed Jesus' appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Jesus opened the eyes of the disciples to understand the truth about His crucifixion and resurrection, prompting them to action. In this session, we will consider Jesus' appearances to His disciples in Jerusalem, where they were gathered. Jesus moved the disciples to specific action, preparing them to receive the authority and power of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of making disciples across all nations. This instruction wasn't only for the disciples but for all Christians, both then and today. Our mission is to join God in what He is doing by offering hope and the new life found only in Jesus.

Session Outline

1. The risen Savior brings His disciples peace and joy (John 20:19-20).
2. The risen Savior gives His disciples a mission (John 20:21-23).
3. The risen Savior calls His disciples to great faith (John 20:24-29).

Background Passage: John 20:19–21:25

Session in a Sentence

When Jesus appeared to His disciples, He told them that they would go on mission to tell others the gospel and by doing so draw sinners to Him through faith.

Christ Connection

As God the Father sent His Son, God the Son sends His people to the world to call on sinners to place faith in Christ. As Christians, we are a sent people who are being formed in the image of our sending God and our suffering Savior.

Missional Application

Because we have been saved through faith in Jesus, we represent Jesus in mission as we live by faith and tell about His forgiveness to the world.

Group Time

GROUP MEMBER CONTENT

Introduction

READ: Recount the illustration of preparation for swimming in the Olympics on page 112 in the DDG.

The Australian swim team reported their training for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro as follows:

Monday: Two-hour swim in the morning and two-hour swim in the afternoon alongside one hour of circuit training.

Tuesday: Two-hour swim and two hours in the gym in the morning and one hour of Pilates in the afternoon.

Wednesday: Two-hour swim in the morning and two-hour swim in the afternoon.

Thursday: Two-hour swim and two hours in the gym in the morning and one-hour cardio and one-hour core work in the afternoon.

Friday: Two-hour swim and one-hour circuit training in the morning and two-hour swim in the afternoon.

Saturday: Three-hour swim and two-hour circuit training.¹

This list doesn't include warm-ups, cool-downs, providing for nutritional needs, or the other "before" and "after" requirements. They keep this disciplined routine for years and years before attending the games, and it is only excellence in preparation that equates to success in the pool.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



What situations in your life require preparation, and how do you prepare for them? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

SAY: Preparation is everything when you are an athlete planning to compete in the Olympic games. Preparation is vital for joining Jesus in His gospel mission as well.

SUMMARIZE: In this session, we will consider Jesus' appearances to His disciples in Jerusalem, where they were gathered. Jesus moved the disciples to specific action, preparing them to receive the authority and power of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of making disciples across all nations. This instruction wasn't only for the disciples but for all Christians, both then and today. Our mission is to join God in what He is doing by offering hope and the new life found only in Jesus.

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Point 1: The risen Savior brings His disciples peace and joy (John 20:19-20).

READ John 20:19-20 (DDG p. 113).

¹⁹ When it was evening on that first day of the week, the disciples were gathered together with the doors locked because they feared the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰ Having said this, he showed them his hands and his side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 113) to comment on the disciples’ state of mind as they gathered behind locked doors.

The grief, fear, and uncertainty had set in with Jesus’ disciples. Would they face the same fate as Jesus? And what were they to make of the empty tomb? Beset by unanswered questions, the disciples huddled together behind locked doors. But then Jesus entered the room and issued a greeting of peace! After all, grief becomes a temporary malady in light of Jesus’ resurrection and the truth of our own at His return. Fear flees when we look upon the risen Lord who has already defeated death.

Voices from the Church

“But here we see the peace of God is not the *absence* of negative thoughts, it is the *presence* of God himself ... It is a sense that no matter what happens, everything will ultimately be all right, even though it may not be *all right* at the moment.”²

—Timothy Keller

- Despite the guilt the disciples no doubt felt for leaving Jesus in His darkest moments, the disciples rejoiced when they saw the risen Savior, the substance of their faith and the confirmation that all of Scripture is true.
- Grief and fear are real emotions and responses to our situations; we can be honest and acknowledge these feelings. But believers must also acknowledge that grief and fear won’t last forever. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, Jesus’ followers need not succumb to the power of grief and fear.

Commentary: “Jesus identified himself to his followers by showing them his nail-pierced hands and the wound in his side (v. 20), then He commissioned them. Some, especially Peter, may initially have been apprehensive to see Jesus in light of their less-than-perfect performance surrounding Jesus’s crucifixion. But joy prevailed, and Jesus showed no sign of ill will but rather attended to the business at hand (v. 20). Startlingly, the risen Lord can walk through closed doors. This indicates that resurrected bodies are no longer subject to the same limitations that apply to our present earthly bodies. On other occasions, Jesus is able to vanish from sight at an instant (Luke 24:31). His followers may mistake him for a ghost (Luke 24:39) or initially fail to recognize him (Luke 24:16; John 20:14; 21:4). But while Jesus’s glorified body can walk through closed doors and appear or disappear apparently at will, it is still the glorified body of the same Jesus who was crucified only a short time before his resurrection appearances.”³

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

 What are some ways the resurrection of the Savior should dispel fear and grief in the lives of believers? (the fear of death can give way to the hope of eternal life with Jesus; believers can grieve the death of loved ones with hope for the future resurrection; grief over our sins can give way to the joy of forgiveness through faith in our resurrected Savior; fear of sharing the gospel can become joy in proclaiming Jesus has risen)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 113) to highlight the impact the disciples' encounter with the risen Jesus had on their disposition and outlook going forward.

An experience with the Savior will change our disposition, just as it did for the disciples. Jesus had promised in John 16:20 that the disciples would be sorrowful for a time but that their grief would soon turn to joy. This appearance of the risen Savior fulfilled that promise. The transition from grief and fear to peace and joy occurs when we gaze upon the One who is powerful over all—over our sin, over the world, and even over death.

INSTRUCT: Ask group members to use the scale in their DDG (p. 113) to rate the presence of God's peace and joy in their lives.

How would you rate the presence of God's peace and joy in your life?



Nonexistent

Bearing Fruit

EXPLAIN: Offer the following *application* to help your group members know how they can move from grief and fear to peace and joy in Christ.

Application: Often the world is marked by frantic busyness, cynicism, and frustration, but God's people are to be marked by their peace and joy, both found in the fruit of the Spirit. These are not characteristics we can conjure up on our own. Only interaction with our risen Savior and the work of His Spirit can cultivate peace and joy in our lives. But how can we interact with Jesus today? As Pastor Scotty Smith writes: "Jesus' encounter with the fearful, guilt-ridden disciples is a model of what should happen every time we gather together in Jesus' name to worship God. Jesus comes into our midst and speaks to us by his Word, and then applies the gospel of peace to our souls and breathes his Spirit upon us, commissioning us to go forth as servants of the gospel."⁴ In other words, we engage with Jesus whenever we gather with His body, the church, and together receive the Spirit-empowered teaching of His Word.

Point 2: The risen Savior gives His disciples a mission (John 20:21-23).

READ John 20:21-23 (DDG p. 114).

²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I also send you.” ²² After saying this, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 114) to communicate the parallel between God’s sending of His Son and the Son’s sending of His disciples with the Holy Spirit.

We serve a sending God who sent His Son so that we might be reconciled to Him. As we are united to Jesus by faith, we then are sent on mission by Him. Believers participate in God’s ministry of reconciliation with sinners by offering them His promise of forgiveness of sins. This sending isn’t a “casting out” but a “going with” because the gospel message cannot go forth without the power and help of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus provides to His followers.

- Over and over again in Scripture, we see the call go out to God’s people to be light in dark places (Matt. 5:14-16) just as Jesus was and is the light that has dawned on those living in the land of the shadow of death (see Matt. 4:15-16; cf. Isa. 9:1-2). Jesus humbled Himself and became a servant so that we could be forgiven of our sin and made right with God. Jesus has secured our eternity through His crucifixion and resurrection! The right response to the grace we’ve been given by God is to share this great promise with others both near and far.
- Jesus’ giving of the Holy Spirit here is not the pouring out of the Holy Spirit as found in the Pentecost account (see Acts 2). Here Jesus gave the disciples “a measure of the Holy Spirit, probably to enhance their learning times between the resurrection and the ascension.”⁵

Commentary: “When God created Adam, he breathed the breath of the Spirit into his nostrils, and Adam became a living soul. At that moment, God gave our first parents the task of taking care of all of God’s creation. Jesus also breathed on his disciples, empowering and giving them a task. The Jewish people believed that only God can forgive sins. When Jesus breathed his Spirit on his disciples, he transferred authority to them to spread the Good News of forgiveness of sins, as evidenced from the Day of Pentecost ... God’s Spirit gives each of us the spiritual authority we need to fight our battles and to do God’s will.”⁶

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



What are some ways Christians can live “sent”? (go to unreached people groups with the gospel of Jesus; be a light for Christ in the workplace; serve in the community in Jesus’ name; obey the leading of the Holy Spirit to share the gospel with others)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 114) to stress that the mission of the gospel is for every believer, both individually and collectively as the church.

The mission of sharing the good news of Jesus is not only for those called to be pastors or international missionaries. Rather, it is the mission of every believer, both individually and collectively as the church. The church and its members have received from Jesus, the head of the church, the authority to proclaim the forgiveness of sin. Through the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, we are called to Jesus in repentance and faith, and through the same work of God, we are sent that we may call others to Jesus as well.

- John recorded this event as his version of the Great Commission (see Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:4-11). Jesus' command and the coming of the Holy Spirit are the basis of the church's authority and power to take the gospel to the nations.
 - Only God can forgive sins (Mark 2:5-12), so Jesus' instruction to His disciples in John 20:23 does not mean believers as individuals or as the church collectively have the authority to *forgive* sin. It means they have the authority to *proclaim* sinners as forgiven.⁷ Through the leadership of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' followers are permitted to proclaim on earth only what is already true in heaven, namely, that those who repent and believe the gospel message have received the forgiveness of sins.
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FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 114).

Mission of the Church: The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the **Spirit** and make **disciples** by proclaiming the gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the **glory** of God and the **good** of the world.

Essential Doctrine “Mission of the Church”: The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the **Spirit** and make **disciples** by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the **glory** of God and the **good** of the world.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



How do forgiveness and unity within a church help to support the mission of the church? (church members forgiving one another illustrates the forgiveness in Christ the church is to proclaim; unity in a church demonstrates the reality that we are saved by one faith in one Savior; a forgiving and unified church encourages believers to call others to join in the faith)

Point 3: The risen Savior calls His disciples to great faith (John 20:24-29).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read John 20:24-29 (DDG p. 115).

²⁴ But Thomas (called “Twin”), one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples were telling him, “We’ve seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “If I don’t see the mark of the nails in his hands, put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

²⁶ A week later his disciples were indoors again, and Thomas was with them. Even though 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 look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Don’t be faithless, but believe.”

²⁸ Thomas responded to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Jesus said, “Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 115) to highlight Jesus’ kindness toward Thomas in meeting him in his unbelief and the faith this encounter engendered in Thomas.

Jesus showed astounding kindness and care to Thomas. This doubting disciple had heard the reports, but now he saw the risen Savior with his own eyes and touched Him with his own hands. Jesus met Thomas in his unbelief and offered up the proof of His resurrection. In response, Thomas believed and exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!” Questioning is not an assault on the truth, which can stand its ground. Instead, it may be a helpful exercise that results in deep faith, just as it did for Thomas, by God’s grace.

- Faith is not a matter of settling for a lower intellectual standard so that we can believe in things that will make us feel better about life. Faith is coming to realize, despite what some circumstances might suggest, that God can satisfy us in ways beyond our comprehension. When Thomas met the risen Lord Jesus, he was compelled to accept this truth: God’s promises had come to fruition in Jesus’ resurrection, and eternal life, eternal satisfaction, had been obtained for God’s people through the crucifixion and resurrection of God’s Son in the flesh.

INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.



Why do you think Jesus would seem to prioritize faith that comes without seeing? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 115) to emphasize how believers still “see” Jesus through the eyes of faith as we read God’s Word, and this leads to the necessity of evangelism.

Thomas believed when He saw the object of His faith—the risen Jesus. We don’t have the privilege to see Jesus with our eyes today, at least not yet, but we don’t trust Him in blind faith either. We have eyewitness accounts in the Gospels that testify to Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. So Jesus said those who believe in Him through the word of these eyewitnesses are blessed. But how can they believe if they haven’t heard about Jesus? The good news of Jesus must be shared, and all believers have been sent into the world with this gospel (Rom. 10:14-15).

- God has provided for us His Word, in which the eyewitnesses and spokesmen for God and His Son recorded their inspired words and encounters for us (see 2 Pet. 1:16-21). Therefore, we walk by faith, not by sight, as we “see” Jesus through the eyes of faith as we read God’s Word (2 Cor. 5:7). We should not think that the Gospels are privileged in this regard, for all of Scripture is God-breathed and points to Jesus as God’s Son sent to die on the cross for our sins and be raised again for our eternal life.

Commentary: Cyril of Alexandria (c. 378-444) stated the following concerning Jesus’ resurrected body: “We are taught by the slight lack of faith shown by the blessed Thomas that the mystery of the resurrection is effected on our earthly bodies and in Christ as the firstfruits of the human race. He was no phantom or ghost, fashioned in human shape, simulating the features of humanity, nor yet, as others have foolishly surmised, a spiritual body that is compounded of a subtle and ethereal substance different from the flesh. For some attach this meaning to the expression ‘spiritual body.’ Since all our expectation and the significance of our irrefutable faith, after the confession of the holy and consubstantial Trinity, centers in the mystery concerning the flesh, the blessed Evangelist has very pertinently put this saying of Thomas side by side with the summary of what preceded.”⁸

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 115).

Evangelism: The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the **gospel** to all **nations**. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by **verbal** witness undergirded by a Christian **lifestyle**.

Essential Doctrine “Evangelism”: It is the duty and privilege of every Christian and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man’s spirit by God’s Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all thus rests upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the **gospel** to all **nations**. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by **verbal** witness undergirded by a Christian **lifestyle**.

My Mission

PACK ITEM 13: EVERY SAVED PERSON: Use the **David Platt quote** on this poster as you conclude this session and help your group members consider their role in the mission Jesus has given His followers and the church.

- The lives of Christians should look significantly different from the world around them. Our disposition should reflect our understanding of the gospel: Jesus has defeated sin, death, and evil and offers us reconciliation with God both now and forever through His work on the cross. This is reason to rejoice! We are a people marked by the kindness of our Savior. Our faith in the resurrection should change the way we approach and spend our days. We are to live as sent people, joining in God's mission to extend the good news of Jesus to all people through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are to be people who live by faith, focused not on the desires of our flesh but on Jesus and His eternal reward, knowing our earthly desires are but rags in light of His promises.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 116), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God's Word.

Because we have been saved through faith in Jesus, we represent Jesus in mission as we live by faith and tell about His forgiveness to the world.

- **What do you need to repent of that is hindering the growth of joy and peace in your life?**
- **What are some ways your group can go together into your community and further to spread the good news of the risen Savior?**
- **Who is experiencing doubts about Jesus, and how can you help them in their search for answers?**



Voices from Church History

"God's command 'Go ye, and preach the gospel to every creature' was the categorical imperative. The question of personal safety was wholly irrelevant."⁹

—Elisabeth Elliot (1926-2015)

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, You sent Your only Son to save us, and in turn, He has sent us so that others might be saved. Thank You for the peace and confidence that You have provided for us through Jesus' resurrection. As those to whom Christ has given His Spirit, enable us to proclaim forgiveness in Jesus' name to sinners everywhere so that they too might confess the words "My Lord and my God!" Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the **Daily Study** devotions in their DDG (pp. 117-119), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use **Encourage One Another** (p. 120) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God's Word.

Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The **Daily Study** devotions in the DDG (pp. 117-119) will help group members get into God's Word and study it for themselves. **Encourage One Another** (p. 120) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 117-119) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for **Day 3** as a part of point 3 in the session: **Although we don't get to see and touch the wounds of Jesus as a testimony to His resurrection, we don't trust blindly. Our faith is seeing faith through the eyes of those who saw the risen Savior, like Thomas.**



Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God's Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- **Day 1:** "Death loses its sting and frustrations lose their pain in light of what God has promised for those who love Him."
- **Day 4:** "May every moment of our lives point others to the One who can save and redeem."



Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God's Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member's DDG (p. 120) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using *The Gospel Project* in their groups.

- **Encourage group members to discuss with one another their experiences with doubts about the Christian faith and finding comfort and/or resolution.**
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.

Additional Commentary

Point 1: The risen Savior brings His disciples peace and joy (John 20:19-20).

“On the evening of the day he appeared to Mary Magdalene, Jesus appeared to a group of his disciples. They had not yet seen the resurrected Lord, though they had heard Mary’s testimony (20:18). Filled with sorrow and fear, they had gathered behind locked doors, afraid of being persecuted by the Jewish leaders. *Jesus came and stood among them*, greeting them with words they desperately needed to hear from him: “*Peace be with you!*” (20:19). He had already promised them a unique peace that would help them overcome every fear and trouble in the world (14:27; 16:33). However, they would only experience this comfort, joy and boldness after they had seen and experienced the risen Lord. When Jesus *showed them his hands and side*, bearing the marks of his crucifixion, they were convinced that he had indeed risen and were *overjoyed* (20:20).”¹⁰

“At one level, the greeting *Peace be with you!* is conventional, representing Hebrew **šālōm ālēkem**, still in use today. Indeed, perhaps when the disciples first heard the risen Lord utter it, they thought little of it, being so astonished and overjoyed that linguistic subtleties would elude them. But the repetition of the greeting (vv. 21,26) would eventually prompt the reflective amongst them to recall that Jesus before the cross had promised to bequeath to them his peace (14:27; 16:33). Though a common word, **šālōm** was also the embracing term used to denote the unqualified well-being that would characterize the people of God once the eschatological kingdom had dawned. Jesus’ ‘Shalom!’ on Easter evening is the complement of ‘it is finished’ on the cross, for the peace of reconciliation and life from God is now imparted.”¹¹

Point 2: The risen Savior gives His disciples a mission (John 20:21-23).

“The phrase **He breathed on them** (v. 22) again used Old Testament imagery (Gen. 2:7; Ezek. 37:9). Christ imparted spiritual life in the same way God gave physical life to Adam. This bestowal of the Holy Spirit on the disciples was a precursor of what would take place at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). God does not look to any man to decide whether or not to forgive (John 20:23). However, those who represent Him in sharing the gospel are recognized by forgiving or not forgiving sins, depending on whether the one who hears the message of salvation accepts or rejects Christ as Savior. Because the first two verbs are aorist tense, which suggests a continuation and ongoing of the action of the former verbs, a more literal translation would be thus: ‘Those whose sins you forgive have already been forgiven; those whose sins you do not forgive have not been forgiven’ (see Matt. 16:13-20).”¹²

Point 3: The risen Savior calls His disciples to great faith (John 20:24-29).

“In this text Jesus repeats the greeting, ‘Peace be with you,’ three different times (vv. 19,21,26). It’s been suggested that this is nothing more than a standard greeting, the Hebrew equivalent of ‘hello.’ If so, then why does John record it three times in seven verses? It’s because Jesus is reminding them of an earlier promise: ‘Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don’t let your heart be troubled or fearful’ (14:27). The presence of Jesus transformed their attitude from anxiety to peace. Then Jesus promises that everyone who trusts him will be blessed (20:29). *Blessed* doesn’t simply mean happy. It means a person is accepted by God. They have, through faith, become recipients of all God’s blessings. God’s favor is permanently placed on them through the person of Jesus Christ.”¹³

“Thomas’s confession of Jesus as his **Lord** (Greek, *Kyrios*) and **God** (Greek, *Theos*) provides a literary link with the references to Jesus as God in the prologue (1:1,18). This is one of the strongest texts in the NT on the deity of Christ (see 1:1). Some cults try to explain away this clear affirmation of Jesus’ deity by arguing that Thomas’s statement was merely an exclamation of astonishment that, in effect, took God’s name in vain. Such an explanation is unthinkable, however, given the strong Jewish moral convictions of the day and because it is not consistent with the text, which explicitly says that Thomas said these words to **him**, that is, to Jesus. Thomas’s statement is in fact a clear confession of his newly found faith in Jesus as his Lord and God. John’s entire purpose in writing this book is that all readers come to confess Jesus as their Lord and God in the same way that Thomas did.”¹⁴

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