

Thomas
The Master's Men
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I invite you to take your Bibles and turn with me to John's gospel, chapter 11, please. The gospel by John 11 and then John 14, and then John 20. We've been making our way slowly but surely on these Sunday mornings through "The Master's Men," 12 men who were just ordinary fellas but who accomplished an extraordinary work for the Lord, 12 common men who did something wonderful for God, 12 apostles. There was no one like them. To be an apostle you had to be chosen directly by the Lord Jesus, to be an apostle you had to be a witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. So these were 12 specific men whom the Savior chose, and we've been looking at them on Sunday morning and this morning we're going to look at Thomas.

What's the first word you think of when you think of Thomas? Anyone guess? Doubting Thomas. It's amazing how nicknames stick, isn't it? Many of these names are unfair, and sometimes they're not really representative; someone has said that if we were all named according to our lives, many of us would bear the name, "I'm a mess." Who's this man Thomas? Well, it's to John again that we're indebted for bringing Thomas alive to us. It's amazing how many of the disciples that John deals with and it's John that we're indebted to for bringing Thomas alive to us, and John presents us Thomas on three different occasions. The first time here is in John 11 where the Lord Jesus and the disciples are on their way to Bethany to the grave of Lazarus. The Savior had led his disciples across the Jordan to the safety of Perea because his enemies wanted to kill him, but now Lazarus is dead and the Lord Jesus is leading his disciples back to Bethany and we break into the conversation in verse 14. John 11:14, "Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him. Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellowdisciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him." If I was putting one word over that little paragraph, I would put the word "pessimism," the pessimism of Thomas. He was heroic but it was heroic pessimism for Thomas could see nothing but disaster ahead.

Flick over to John 14. John 14 and the Lord Jesus is telling them here of his imminent departure and he said in verse 3, "if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou

goest; and how can we know the way?" In essence, Thomas was saying, "Lord, you're leaving. We'll never get where you're going. We don't even know how to get there. How are we supposed to get there?" And that gave the Lord Jesus the opportunity for making one of the greatest "I am" statements in the Bible, "I am the way, that's how you can be saved. I am the truth, that's how you can be sure. I am the life, that's how you can be satisfied." And if you're not a Christian this morning, you can be saved sure and satisfied in Christ. Now, if I was putting one word over that paragraph, I would put "realism." Pessimism in John 11, realism in John 12.

Then turn over to this final passage in John's gospel, chapter 20. And if over John 11 we put the phrase "the pessimism of Thomas," and if over John 14 we put "the realism of Thomas," here in John 20 we put "the skepticism of Thomas." You know, every time we meet Thomas it's a dark day, isn't it? It's a cloudy day. We never seem to meet Thomas on a day of sunshine. He's always in trouble, that is, Thomas appears when trouble abounds. He was beyond question the most pessimistic, most melancholy, morose, stubborn of the disciples. He was a constituted pessimist. He could only see the dark side of things. Have you ever met anyone like that? Have you got friends like that? Maybe you're here this morning, your husband's like that, your wife's like that, everything is negative, everything is dismal, everything is dark. You speak to them and say to them, "What a lovely day, isn't it?" "Yeah," they say, "but it won't last long." And Thomas saw every glass as half empty instead of seeing it half full. Thomas could see a dark lining in every silver cloud. He's like the man who would feel bad when he felt good because he was afraid when he would feel worse, he would feel better. Slow to believe. Always anticipating the worst.

Pessimistic, and yet Thomas was a man who really loved the Lord. I mean, is there not a wee bit of Thomas in all of us? You see, Thomas had another name, Didymus, which is Greek, and the both names, Thomas and Didymus mean twin. Thomas had a twin, a twin brother or a twin sister who was Thomas's twin. Many Bible scholars feel that Matthew was the twin of Thomas because whenever Thomas is mentioned, Matthew's always mentioned by his side. But there's a further significance. I believe that Thomas has many twins in the world today and some of them are in this building this morning. I mean, there is so much of Thomas in all of us.

Mentioned only three times in the New Testament and on this final occasion, we see Thomas presented on three different periods, the first Sunday evening during the following week and on the following Sunday. Look at John 20:19,

19 Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews [most people take this as the Upper Room], came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. 20 And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. 21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: 23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them;

and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. 26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. 27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. 28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. 29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

I want you to look at this passage with me just for a moment or two this morning because this is the most detailed record we have of Thomas. In John 11, we have the pessimism of Thomas. In John, 14, we have the realism of Thomas. In John 20, we have the skepticism of Thomas. But I want you to see this passage for a moment. I want you to see Thomas, that the first Sunday evening he's not there, the disciples speak to him the following week, and on the following Sunday he's there. I want you to see three simple things here. I want you to see what Thomas missed. That's simple, isn't it? What Thomas missed. He was absent. Do you see what it says in verse 24, "But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came." The "buts" of the Bible are important. Now, Thomas, may I remind you that he was one of the 12. When you look through the synoptic gospels, you have a list of the 12 disciples, Thomas is mentioned 7th in Matthew's gospel, he's mentioned 8th both in Mark and Luke's gospel, he's mentioned 6th among the disciples in the Upper Room after the resurrection. I want you to see that this man was not just the ordinary rank and file of the disciples. He was one of the 12. He was one whom the Lord Jesus had chosen and set apart to be an apostle. Those who exercise leadership in the local church carry a heavy responsibility. Pastors, elders, deacons, their wives, leaders of departments should not be absent from the Lord's house. Leaders ought to always give an example to the rest of the flock, but one of the Master's chosen disciples was not with them when Jesus came.

What were the reasons for Thomas's absence? Why was he not there? Of course, he could have been ill. Of course, he could have had a prior responsibility. But I think that it was worse than that, I think the way John puts it implies this: that Thomas could have been there but he wasn't. Why? Was he filled with remorse? Was he roaming the rocky ravines, the lonely hills, shedding tears in solitary sadness? Was he thinking about what he had said on the way to the grave of Lazarus, "Let us go with him that we may die with him," but when the moment of the Savior's need had come, Thomas, like the rest of the disciples, forsook Christ and fled. He said that he would die with the Master but in the moment of testing he fled.

Was he filled with remorse? Maybe he was filled with anguish? Perhaps no one suffered so much as Thomas. When the Lord was crucified, do you see how obsessed he is in

verse 25 with the wounds of Christ, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." That sounds like the speech of someone who had endured nightmares of remembrance, and he cannot throw off the sight of those terrible wounds. Was he filled with remorse?

Was he filled with anguish? Maybe he was filled with despair. Maybe he was like those two on the road to Emmaus, "We trusted that it had been he who should have redeemed Israel." Indeed the Redeemer of Israel, had been betrayed by Israel to the Romans and nailed to a Roman gibbet. And to someone of Thomas's temperament, the melancholy temperament, this was the end.

Christ appears to the disciples on Sunday night and like many Christians today, Thomas wasn't in church on Sunday night. My friends, Thomas was in bad company and I want to tell you that if you don't come to the Lord's house on a Sunday evening, if that's your practice, you're in bad company. Did you know that only one other disciple missed that evening? I mean, two disciples missed church that evening, the one who denied Christ and the one who doubted Christ. And my dear friends, whenever you and I are able to come to church, I'm not talking about sickness, but whenever you and I are able to come to church and don't come to church, you weaken your faith, you strengthen your doubt. You show me someone who forsakes the assembly of God's people and I'll show you a weak saint or a lost sinner. Do you know something? When you miss church, you're casting a vote for the devil's crown. Every time you fail to come to the house of the Lord, you're voting to shut the door. Every time you fail to come to the prayer meeting or Bible class, you're voting to shut the door.

Thomas is a tremendous picture of why being faithful to the assembly is so vitally important. You see, you and I've got this idea that church attendance is optional. It's not. It's a command from the Lord. You remember the book of Hebrews says "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is." You see, your absence is a testimony to the world that your life is more important than his worship. When you come to church, you're proclaiming your faith in a risen Lord. You're teaching your children the importance of God's house. You're building a wall of protection around your heart and life. You're strengthening your faith and growing your life in the Lord.

Why was Thomas absent? Why are God's people absent today? Wonder this morning, are you always here when you ought to be? Am I always here when I ought to be? Doubtless there are the excuses, but then an excuse is the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie. Why are we not honest with the Lord? Why do we not say, "Well, Lord, I've no heart to go. I'm called spiritually. I don't want to go, Lord. If it was a BBQ down there at the back, if it was a football match, if it was a cricket match, if it was a rugby match, if it was a cover ware evening, if it was overtime at work, I would be there, but Lord, my heart's not in the meetings. Perhaps I should examine my life and see if I'm saved." Someone wrote a true confession one time that went like this, "Lord, Almighty God, as I sit here tonight surrounded by newspapers and half watching TV, it's just come to my attention that I've lied to you and myself. I said I was too busy to go to church tonight. That wasn't true. If it

had been a football match or any other place, I would have went being too tired, seeming to cover up my indifference. Lord, have mercy upon me. I've lied. I'm not too tired. I'm indifferent. Warm my cold heart for that's the real reason I stayed at home."

But let's be honest with ourselves this morning, you see, the Lord knows my heart and he knows your heart. He's the omniscient Christ. He's the one who's risen in power and great glory, and he sees beneath the veneer and the mask that so often we put up, and he can see right into the inner recesses of your soul this morning. What were the reasons for Thomas's absence? Look again at the passage. What were the results of Thomas's absence? Thomas was absent when he should have been present. He missed the blessing. Look at verse 12 again, "But Thomas, one of the 12 called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came." What did he miss? He missed the presence of the Lord. Then came Jesus and stood in the midst of them. He was really alive. There he was standing in their midst. He had risen from the dead. He was alive but Thomas was absent. My friend, listen, the risen Lord said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And when we fail to gather in his name, listen, we're not gathering in any other name this morning, we may have a name outside this church, but we're only gathering in the name of Jesus Christ and when we gather in the name of the Lord, he has promised to be with us. Listen, Thomas missed the presence of the Lord.

Look at John 20 again. He missed something else, he missed the peace of the Lord. The disciples came to that Upper Room and they were moody and gloomy and they were discouraged and most of them went to lament a dead Savior. They didn't really believe that he was risen. It says, verse 19, then "came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you." No wonder the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord, and how many times have you and I gone to an assembly of God's people, whether it's this one or someone else, and we have been down in the dumps and we have been discouraged and we have come and we have gathered around the word of God and we have been refreshed and our spirits have been lifted and our hearts have been encouraged?

He missed the presence of the Lord. He missed the peace of the Lord. Something else, he missed the people of the Lord. The risen Lord appeared to Thomas, to the disciples, but Thomas wasn't there. Doesn't mean that a person cannot find Christ in solitude, but it's more likely to occur among the fellowship of those who believe. Thomas missed out the mutual fellowship when we come together as a company of God's people. You know the worst thing that Thomas did? He brooded by himself. You ever done that? I have. Brooded by yourself? Maybe you've taken the car on Sunday morning instead of coming to the Lord's house, you've driven to some lake or you've driven to some mountain and you've just brooded, obsessed with yourself? Pastor was visiting one day a man who he had noticed missing from the assembly of God's people and he went into his house and he found him sitting by a fire and the man said to the pastor, he said, "I can get as much out of church by turning on the radio or watching it on the internet." Without a word said that pastor went over to the fire and he took a pair of tongs and with those tongs he lifted a live coal from the fire and he placed it to the side, and then together the man and the

preacher, they watched as that coal began to die, lose its glow, and nothing was left but a dying ember. And the man said to the preacher, "I'll be out on Sunday."

What Thomas missed? He was absent. He missed the presence of the Lord. He missed the peace of the Lord. He missed the people of the Lord. He missed the precept of the Lord for at this meeting the risen Lord commissioned his disciples, "As my Father has sent me, even so, send I you." The Lord gave them a job to do but Thomas missed his assignment.

What do you miss when you could come but you don't? The presence of the Lord. The peace of the Lord. The people of the Lord. The precept of the Lord. Look at verse 26. He missed the passion of the Lord. He missed seeing the wounds of Jesus Christ. You see, when the Lord appeared through that door that evening to dispel the disciples because they thought it was a ghost, he showed them his hands and his feet.

General Gordon was a British hero of Khartoum and on one occasion he saw a young man in desperate danger. This young man was surrounded by a fanatical mob and riding into the midst of them General Gordon rescued this young man from death and from danger, but in so doing he sustained a scar to his cheek. The years went by, the young man that he rescued grew up to be a lawyer and eventually he became the opponent of General Gordon in a political quarrel. And one evening he went to hear Gordon speaking, he wanted to get to know Gordon, he wanted to get to know him a wee bit better so that he could be forearmed for the debate that was coming up, and he went to hear Gordon speak, and in the glare of the sunlight and the glare rather of the moonlight, he saw the scar on his face and he ran from the meeting crying, "I forgot the scar! I forgot the scar!"

Let me ask you this morning: have you forgotten the scar? Have you forgotten the scars of Calvary? Have you forgotten the wounds of the Savior? Have you forgotten, Christian friend, the price that Christ paid to secure your salvation? Listen, the Lord's Table is open to you this morning. He's saying to you, "This do in remembrance of me." You say that's being a Baptist. No, that's being a Bible Christian. That's Bible. It's not Baptist, it's Bible. "This do in remembrance of me. As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you do show the Lord's death till he come." Friend of mine went to an elder of his church and said, "Why don't we remember the Lord every Sunday?" "Oh," he said, "you'd become familiar with it." Listen, it's Bible. It's Bible. Have you forgotten the scar? Have you forgotten the wounds? You don't have to be a member to sit at this Table, you have to be saved, and the elders last asked that the sisters would cover their head so that no glory might be seen, only his glory. Have you forgotten the scars of Calvary?

What Thomas missed? He was absent. Look at John 20 again very quickly. I want you to see what Thomas missed. I want you to see what Thomas mentioned. What Thomas missed, he was absent. What Thomas mentioned, he was adamant. Look at verse 26, "The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord." You see, a week has passed now and something must have happened between those two Sundays. Thomas was with the disciples this time. I hope it means that Thomas was missed. I hope it means that other folk in that Upper Room were looking out for Thomas. Incidentally, do you look out for those who are missing? You say, "That's the pastor's job." No, it's not. It's

yours. Do you look out for those who are missing? Have you gone out of your way looking for the folk who are usually there?

Well, the other disciples did because Thomas was with them the following Sunday evening and they said, "Thomas, we have seen the Lord." I want you to see their testimony. Look at verse 25, the word "said" in verse 25. It's interesting. It's in the active voice. It means that they kept on telling him about seeing Jesus. They said, "Thomas, we've had a wonderful experience. We've seen the Lord." I want you to see that these disciples were not callously indifferent to their erring brother. They didn't say, "Well, there's no need to be troubled. If Thomas had been in his proper place last Sunday night, he would have seen the Lord." No, the more we love the Savior, the more we love the saints. And as soon as the risen Lord had made himself known to them, they sought out Thomas and they kept saying, "Thomas, we have seen the Lord." I wonder does that not challenge us this morning? I wonder are you and I indifferent to the Lord's erring people? Do we seek the wandering and wayward sheep? Do we seek to restore that Christian that's been overtaken by a fault?

I want you to see their testimony and then notice in response his test. He says, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." In the Greek, it's a double negative. "I will on no account believe. I want proof hard, tangible evidence." Seeing is not good enough, Thomas wants to feel. He wants to put his finger into the groove where the nails have been. He wants to thrust his hand into the Savior's side. I submit to you this morning that Thomas was more than a doubter, he was an unbeliever.

It's interesting that the first time he's spoken, John 11, he spoke with the voice of his heart, "Let us go that we may die with him." The second time he spoke in John, 14, he spoke with the voice of his mind, "How can we know the way?" But the third time he speaks he speaks with the voice of his will, "I will not believe." Do you know something? Thomas had witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus, Thomas had heard Christ promise that he would rise from the dead, and yet Thomas chose not to believe that the Lord was risen. I wonder are there any Thomas's in our midst this morning? Maybe you're an unbelieving believer. Maybe you're doubting the promises of God's word. Maybe you're failing to take God at his word. Maybe this is the sin that doth so easily beset you?

What Thomas missed, he was absent. What Thomas mentioned, he was adamant. But notice very quickly and finally what Thomas manifested, he was adoring. You see, he's on his knees now and he says, "My Lord and my God." You say, "Well, Denis, what did he manifest?" A spirit of worship. A spirit of worship. You see, he was with them this time. Look at verse 26, "and Thomas with them." You see, although he missed one Sunday evening, he was there the next Sunday evening. I wonder do you need to follow his example? You need to go and do likewise. You know what really concerns me? The indifference of God's people. The apathy of God's people. So many professing Christians, professing that, they seem to have no appetite for the word of God. They seem to have no desire for the place of prayer. Listen, my friends, may I remind you this morning that our two midweek services there, the Assembly Bible Class and the Assembly Prayer

Meeting, and apart, dear, from all the prayer meetings you have in your home, and I'm not opposing that, but these are the Assembly Prayer Meetings. This is the assembly Bible Class. This is where we come together as a church and we are great, you know, we are great at dividing the church into young and old, male and female. I doubt if ever that happened in the early church. I can't see it.

But the fellowship gathered together and they gathered together for the apostles' doctrine and for breaking of bread and for fellowship and for prayer, and here's Thomas and he's with them on the second occasion, and he's on his knees and he's crying, "My Lord and my God." What does he discover very quickly? A Savior who treats us graciously. A Savior who treats us graciously. I mean, wasn't the Lord amazingly gentle with Thomas? Here's a Christian who's let the Lord down. Here's a Christian who's forsaken the Lord. Here's a Christian who's fled from the Lord. Here's a Christian who was absent from the Upper Room. Here's a Christian who's demanding his own proof, his own evidence, and what do I find the risen Lord doing with him? Stinging him with rebuke? No. Pointingly ignoring him? Never. Excommunicating him? Not at all. Giving in to his conditions? Yes. Look at verse 27. He said to Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." Do you see how gentle the risen Lord was with his waywardness?

I wonder this morning, have you forsook him? I wonder have you made your demands on Christ? A Sunday school teacher once asked her class, "Is there anything manmade in heaven?" And to her surprise one little boy said, "Yes, ma'am, there is." And she was shocked. And she said to the little boy, "Well, son, what's manmade in heaven?" He said, "The nail prints in the Savior's hands." I wonder this morning do you need to get your eyes off everything else and just see the nail prints in his hands and fall down at his feet and cry, "My Lord and my God."

What kind of Savior did Thomas worship? A Savior who treats us graciously. Something else, a Savior who knows his intimate life. You see, nobody had to report Thomas's words to the Savior. The one you and I adore and worship this morning is all-knowing. He's the one who can see into the inner recesses of your soul this morning. He knows when you and I are putting on the face, the mask, the outward show. He says, "Thomas, reach hither thy finger and behold my hands, and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless but believing." How searching that this living Lord Jesus this morning, he not only knows the deeds that I perform but he knows every word in my life. "There's not a word in my mouth but, O Lord, thy knowest it altogether."

"My Lord and my God." What kind of Savior do we worship this morning? A Savior who treats us graciously. A Savior who knows us intimately. A Savior who challenges us personally. You see Thomas's confession. He calls him Lord, that refers to his divine authority. He calls him God, that refers to his divine identity. He calls him "My Lord and my God," that refers to his divine necessity. Old Vance Havner said this, "Let a Christian get right on the Lordship of Jesus Christ and he's right on every other issue. The flagship of the fleet is the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and if that ship leads, all other ships will follow: church membership, fellowship, discipleship, stewardship, worship will follow

the flagship." You see, Thomas treated the Savior not just as the Son of God but God of very God. "My Lord," that put Jesus on the throne of his heart. "My God," that put Jesus on the throne of the universe.

Look at verse 29. Jesus said, "because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." You say, "To whom was the Lord referring?" He was thinking of us. For Thomas seeing was believing. For us believing is seeing. Ancient testimony tells us that Thomas carried the gospel as far to India and that he was martyred for his faith by being run through with a spear, a fitting form of martyrdom for one whose faith was restored when he saw the spear print in the Savior's side.

What Thomas missed, he was absent. What Thomas mentioned, he was adamant. What Thomas manifested, he was adoring. And let me ask you and I'm finished, like Thomas have you been absent when you ought to have been present? Oh, you can point back to a conversion experience 30-40 years ago. I'm asking you this morning is Jesus Christ a bright living reality to you? Do you know his presence with you daily or has your fellowship become stale, mechanical, formal? Do you know what it is that restores you? It's the sight of the Savior's wounds. It's a recognition that because of his wounds we belong to him.

So many things today vie for our attention. We're challenged by the call of money. We're challenged by the call of business. We're challenged by the call of fame. We're challenged by the call of materialism. We're challenged by the call of climbing the social ladder. But let's never forget that one who walks down the corridors of the century, one who merely by revealing to us his hands reminds us of his claim upon us. My friends, those nail-scarred hands speak to us eloquently this morning. They say,

"I gave My life for thee,
My precious blood I shed,
That thou mightst ransomed be,
And quickened from the dead;
I gave, I gave My life for thee,
What hast thou given for Me?"

May the Lord bless his word to all of our hearts this morning.