

What Doubting Thomas Can Teach Us

John 20:24-29; 1 Peter 1:8

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We find in our text today a blessing which many of us perhaps would never consider to be a blessing. For we are so often of the mind that if we were living in the days in which the Lord Jesus ministered here on the earth and if we heard His words and beheld His miracles, we would be more likely to believe in Him and His power to save, to believe in His faithfulness to provide for all our needs, to hope in the certainty of all His promises. That is because we have adopted the modern day, unbiblical view that “seeing is believing”.

We have made excuses for our unbelief and doubts that if we had only lived to see the Red Sea miraculously open and Israel walk across on dry land, we would believe. If we had only lived to see Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego talking with the Lord Jesus in that fiery furnace without even the smell of fire upon them when they came out from it, we would believe. If we had only lived to see Jesus walk on the water, or multiply the 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread to feed thousands, or instantaneously heal the blind, the deaf, the paralyzed, and raise the dead, we would doubt Him no more.

But dear ones, seeing is not believing; for many saw all these miracles with their eyes and heard the words of the Lord Jesus with their ears, and yet believed not. The problem is not that there is not enough evidence to believe in Jesus Christ—the problem is that we do not take the Lord Jesus at His word. Though He is absolutely trustworthy (for He cannot lie, Titus 1:2), we choose to cling to what we can see with our eyes and hear with our ears rather than trust Almighty God and His faithfulness.

May God lift up your faith to lay hold of Jesus Christ today as He has

revealed Himself in His Word. The main points from our text this Lord's Day are the following: (1) Thomas Gives an Ultimatum of Unbelief (John 20:24-25); (2) Christ Condescends to the Ultimatum of Thomas (John 20:26-27); (3) Thomas Confesses His Faith in the Resurrected Christ (John 20:28-29).

I. Thomas Gives an Ultimatum of Unbelief (John 20:24-25).

A. This is one of the resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ to His followers. Jesus had appeared to His apostles that evening of the first day of the week—the very day in which He was raised from the dead. In that first appearance Thomas was absent (perhaps so overcome by discouragement and fear that the Lord Jesus had been publicly crucified by the Romans at the insistence of the Jews. The resurrected Lord Jesus appeared to encourage the faith of His disciples, but Thomas was not with the others due to his own struggles he was facing in his own heart).

1. Dear ones, it is not the right response to struggles you face to remove yourself from your brethren (even if you do not feel like being with them). The Lord Jesus is far more likely to lift up your faith to behold the mercy of the Lord in the company of the faithful than when you feed your own heartache with tears, despondency, sorrow, and self-pity.

2. The Lord Jesus miraculously appeared to these weak and struggling apostles and graciously confirmed their faltering faith by revealing to them that He was raised from the dead—He is alive! Beloved, there is no reason to believe in a dead Savior. There is no reason to hope in a Savior who could not overcome death (1 Corinthians 15:17). But there is every reason to trust in and commit yourselves wholeheartedly to Jesus Christ whom Satan, His enemies, and even death could not keep in the grave (1 Corinthians 15:20).

C. What does Scripture tell us about the Apostle Thomas?

1. Thomas was a twin. For Thomas means twin in Hebrew,

while Didymus (another name by which he went) means twin in Greek.

2. When the Lord Jesus heard of the death of Lazarus and told His disciple that He wanted to return to Judea in order to raise Lazarus from the dead, as a group they tried to dissuade Jesus from going to Judea due to their fear of the Jewish leaders who had previously tried to stone Him to death. The disciples believed this would be their fate as well if they returned to Judea. But loyal and devoted Thomas stepped forward from the rest and declared: "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). There was a fierce loyalty to Christ that was present in the heart of Thomas.

3. On the night of Christ's betrayal by Judas, the Lord Jesus had been teaching the apostles that He must go to prepare a place for them in heaven through His death and resurrection. Christ explained to them that they knew where He was going and how to get there. Thomas in all sincerity and honesty asked: "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way" (John 14:5,6)? No doubt Thomas should have known, but he was honest in wanting to know the truth. Thomas was a fervent and believing follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. Now when the disciples who witnessed the resurrected Christ saw Thomas, they all declared together: "We have seen the Lord" (John 20:25). Thomas dangerously puts God to the test when he proudly proclaims: "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" (John 20:25).

1. Dear ones, when it is our duty either to believe what is true or to do what is right, we are not to tempt the Lord our God by giving Him an ultimatum that we will believe or practice what is revealed to be true only upon certain conditions. In the case of Thomas, the Old Testament Scriptures had prophesied the death and resurrection of Christ (Psalm 16:9-11; Isaiah 53:10-11). Christ Himself had predicted in

the presence of His apostles His own death and resurrection (Matthew 12:40; 16:21). God had given credible testimonies by the other apostles to the effect that Christ was raised from the dead. And yet Thomas states emphatically that He will never believe (a double negative in the Greek text) that Christ is raised unless the Lord Jesus also appears to him and he feels the nail marks in His hands and the spear mark in His side.

a. Beloved, how often have we tempted God and in effect given Him an ultimatum by demanding that He (the Almighty God) jump through some hoop for us just to prove to us that He loves us, or to prove that He is just, or to prove that He is faithful, or to prove that He is all-powerful, or to prove that He is merciful? How many struggles of faith and assurance are in our lives because we do not trust the God who loved us, chose us, redeemed us, and has provided for us. How can we as parents call our children to trust us, if we as adopted children cannot trust our Heavenly Father?

b. Dear ones, God does not have to prove anything to us. There is more than sufficient evidence of His existence, love, justice, faithfulness, power, and mercy from what He has revealed about Himself in nature, Scripture, and providence, so that if all the evidence in the world around us and in the Scripture revealed to us are not sufficient, one additional demand on our part is not going to convince us of the manifold perfections of our God (Luke 16:27-31). Our duty of love to the Lord who has opened the very windows of heaven and poured out upon undeserving sinners like you and me temporal and everlasting blessings beyond our comprehension is not to tempt the Lord our God, but to embrace Him by faith and to reciprocate that love by our thankful obedience to His good, holy, and wise commandments.

c. Are you waiting for God to do something for you before you will fully trust His promises? Are you demanding or bargaining with God for some sign of His love before you will stop worrying or fearing? This is what happens in many churches today; they demand

miraculous signs and great exhibitions of God's power in healings, in visions, and even in resurrections. But so much of this demanding is not faith, but presumption and a lack of faith in trusting what God has already revealed by way of His truth and promises (1 Kings 19:10-12). It is, like Thomas, issuing an ultimatum to the one true living God.

d. Dear ones, this is a folly for which we must repent. God does not usually yield to our demands that He prove to us His love or power, because He is teaching us to trust (to be patient and to be content) in His simple word and promise revealed to us in Holy Scripture. We are free to petition God for whatever is lawful and whatever is needful in living a godly life. But while we wait upon the Lord is faith manifested in our contentment and thankfulness in what He has already given to us? If the Lord waits to give us that for which we have asked until we are mature enough to handle it, or if we never receive that for which we have asked because it was not good for us and because He has something better for us, will we trust Him and love Him? Who do we think we are, puny little people and wretched sinners by nature that we are, that we think we can issue the only wise God some ultimatum that we will withhold something from Him until He meets our demands?

2. Thomas not only tested the Lord by not believing that Jesus was raised from the dead, but in effect he called his fellow apostles liars, as if they had conspired together in promoting a lie. Thomas was bearing false witness against his neighbors by implying they were liars. This was the height of arrogance on the part of Thomas. How often does our speech betray our own arrogance? How often are people hurt and embarrassed by how stupid we make them feel? By our words, by the inflection of our voice, by our gestures or sighs, we communicate to others that they are beneath us.

II. Christ Condescends to the Ultimatum of Thomas (John 20:26-27).

A. Our text states (in John 20:26) that it was eight days later that

all of the apostles met together again (including Thomas this time). That would have placed this second meeting on the following first day of the week (or Lord's Day). It was not an accident (it was purposed) that Jesus Christ waited to appear a second time to His apostles on the first day of the week (or eighth day). We recently spent a couple sermons (Acts 20:7) considering the change the Lord authorized in moving from a seventh day Jewish Sabbath to a first day Christian Sabbath (or Lord's Day). I encourage you to review those sermons on this matter.

B. Again in this meeting on the Lord's Day as in the meeting the previous Lord's Day, the doors are locked and Christ miraculously passes through the walls and appears in the midst of the apostles with these comforting words, "Peace be unto you" (John 20:26). The resurrected Christ does not bless with peace everyone except Thomas, but rather pronounces peace upon even proud, disbelieving Thomas.

1. The Lord Jesus does not come with fiery words of wrath and strike Thomas down upon his knees before Him. For although Thomas had fallen into the sin of unbelief (even in the face of the most credible witnesses), he was a child of God redeemed by the blood of God's precious Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Yes, the life of every Christian (without exception) is one in which the good that we want to do, we don't do, and the evil that we don't want to do, we do (as Paul says of his own struggles with sin in Romans 7:19). That is why your acceptance and standing before God is not and cannot be based upon your own holiness or good works. It is and must always be based upon the imputed righteousness of Christ which is received by faith alone (Philippians 3:9). Even in the midst of your sin, Christ comes to all His dear children (as was Thomas) and declares to you: "Peace be unto you." Not condemning and avenging wrath be unto you, but peace and comfort be unto you. For Christ has perfectly kept the Law of God for you who trust Him and has borne the wrath of God away from

all of you who trust Him. He will confront sin, but He does so in peace.

C. Observe how the Lord directs His rebuke ever so gently to this skeptical apostle: Read John 20:27. The resurrected Christ has an appointment with Thomas—disbelieving and proud Thomas, weak and faltering Thomas, demanding and discouraged Thomas. The Lord commands Thomas to do what he had sinfully demanded before he would believe: to touch the wounds of the resurrected Christ.

1. The Lord Jesus might have opened the earth beneath Thomas for his doubts and unbelief in the face of such credible testimony. Our resurrected Savior might have stricken Thomas with leprosy as He did Miriam for her insubordination and ingratitude. But, dear ones, our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, comes not with vengeance, but rather comes with peace, comfort, and mercy to this struggling Christian (He will not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax).

2. The Lord Jesus breaks our hearts with His kindness. He knocks us down with a feather. Jesus Christ gives Thomas what he had in pride demanded and humbles the heart of Thomas so that he sees his own sin. That was the intended purpose of the Lord—to humble Thomas.

III. Thomas Confesses His Faith in the Resurrected Christ (John 20:28-29).

A. When Thomas touches those precious wounds of Christ (in obedience to Christ's command), the Spirit of God humbles the proud and unbelieving heart of Thomas so that he gives one of the greatest confessions of faith found in Scripture: "my Lord and my God" (John 20:28). He says not, "Lord and God" (as a mere theological declaration of Christ's Divinity), but proclaims "MY Lord and MY God" (as a declaration of personal faith in the resurrected Christ as HIS Lord and HIS God, and so must we).

1. The confession of Thomas implies that he now sees in

sorrow how he himself has spoken and acted as though he was the lord and master by issuing such a foolish ultimatum. Thomas now humbles himself before the resurrected Christ as Lord to whom all authority in heaven and earth belongs and by faith lays hold of his Savior as being the one true living God who is from everlasting to everlasting.

2. There is sorrow in the confession of Thomas for his sin, and yet there is joy in the confession of Thomas for the faithfulness of Christ to such an undeserving sinner. Our confession of sin should likewise be filled with sorrow, but also with joy. Sorrow and joy are inseparable in true confession of sin and repentance. To end on a note of rejoicing after we have grieved over our sin against such a holy and merciful Savior is not minimizing our sin (“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” Matthew 5:4). It is learning to enjoy the forgiveness of sin purchased by Christ our Savior. Dear ones, if all you can see is your sin and unworthiness, if all you know is sorrow and grief, you have not understood the healing wounds of our Savior which are everlasting tokens of His love for you.

3. I must note that this is one of the strongest passages of Scripture identifying Jesus Christ as God. For Thomas is not sending some confession to heaven, but very clearly the text states: “And Thomas answered and said unto HIM (unto whom? Unto Jesus): “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). The implied verb is “YOU ARE my Lord and my God.”

B. Jesus Christ blesses those who trust in Christ without having seen Him (John 20:29). We might wish that we had lived at the time of Thomas so that we might have seen the resurrected Christ. But, dear ones, there is a special blessing attached to the faith that believes without having seen Him. The world calls this foolishness. The world calls this gullibility. But Christ calls it faith—not a blind faith—a seeing and knowing faith (2 Corinthians 5:7).

1. Dear ones, do you believe the words and promises of

Christ without having to see the fulfillment of those promises as did Abraham who left his home in Ur looking for the promise land? Have you set out from this earthly home to look by faith for that heavenly home simply trusting that Christ has purchased such a home for you and will lead you there by His Word? Walking by faith and not by sight (trusting in Christ when Christ cannot be seen) is no easy task for most of us (we often look to others to stand with us, but this faith in Jesus is willing and able to stand even if not stand with you). The true nature of faith is this: “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things NOT SEEN” (Hebrews 11:1). May the Lord open the eye of faith in you that you may believe even when you do not see with your natural eyes the fulfillment of God’s promises that have been made unto you. May you learn to cry out in every trial, temptation, and affliction, in the darkest night and in the most tempestuous storm, in the sorrow and heartache of this life: “my Lord and my God.”

The Lord Jesus is as present with you to the eye of faith as He was to the natural eyes of Thomas. Jesus took one who was a great doubter and made of him one who gave the greatest confession of faith. Are you a doubting Thomas? Do you struggle in trusting Christ for all of your needs? Do you worry and fret about the past, present, or future? Do you put conditions upon your faith and trust in Christ? Dear ones, there is hope today. God delights to take a doubting Thomas and by His grace to make of him a trophy of faith who gave his life for Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:8).

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