

My Lord and my God

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Bible Text: John 20:24-31

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We are studying John's Gospel in our evening services and I would like to read now from chapter 20, reading versus 24 to 31. Last week in this chapter we saw how the risen Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden. He then appears to the disciples in the evening of the first day of the week. We now begin reading in verse 24

24 Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." 26 Eight days later [a week later], his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although 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 see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." 30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son Of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Amen. May God bless to us all the reading and the preaching of his word.

I want to speak to you this evening from words found in John 20:28, the verse which I think is the climax of this whole Gospel, "Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'" I don't know how many of you I am mainly speaking to this evening because I want to address myself chiefly to doubters. I know that many of you aren't doubters. You can say with the man born blind, "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." You are sure of that. You can say with Paul himself, "I know whom I have believed." There is no doubt in your minds that Jesus is the Son of God and that you have

trusted in him and that your salvation is assured and we should praise God for such certainty which is what he wants each of his children to have.

But some of you may not be nearly so sure. You may have intellectual doubts. Is the Bible credible? Are the miracles and the supernatural events in the Bible something we can take literally? So many people in our world who are sure of the Bible. Is there only one way to God? So many religions, so many different ideas, can it be true that only in Christ is there salvation? Is it really necessary to be personally committed to Jesus Christ? Can I not manage with just a general belief in God, of trying to be a decent person and do the best I can? Perhaps the behavior of some professing Christians have been a difficulty for you. Sadly, not all those who are known to be Christians behave all the time in a way that brings honor to the Lord Jesus Christ. Or perhaps you have had bad experiences with Christians. They have been mean to you. They have disappointed you or let you down. Or perhaps you wouldn't go as far as that, you wouldn't call yourself a doubter but surely many of us would say we have moments of that and we have times of doubt. There are not many of us that are absolutely 100% convinced of everything all the time.

This evening I want us to meet the most famous doubter in the history of the world whose name has become proverbial. You look up in the Oxford dictionary under the heading "doubting Thomas" and you will see "an incredulous or skeptical person." Poor old Thomas. One mistake, one doubt and he is branded forever in history. I think it's very unfair and I hope before we finish this evening that you'll agree with me that there is far, far more to Thomas than his doubt and it's not a right thing to take a man or woman at their weak moment and label them afterwards for that. But nonetheless, the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, has recorded Thomas' doubt and put it into the Scripture for good reasons.

Before we come to Thomas himself, let me just mention a couple of reasons why his doubt is in the Bible, why God just didn't pass over it. One thing that I think flows from it is that it demolishes an argument that unbelievers use a lot. They say the resurrection never happened. It was just what the psychologists would call wish fulfillment. The disciples desperately longed for Jesus to rise again, they expected him to rise again and they were so sure that it was going to happen that they convinced themselves that it did happen. That's a psychological phenomenon. People can think themselves into believing something is real but it's not real if they want it very much. But when you read the Gospel records, you see that that wasn't the case at all. In Luke 24:11, for example, the women run from the garden and they tell the apostles, "We have seen Jesus! He is alive!" How do the apostles respond? Did they say, "Well, of course he's alive. We expected that. We knew he was going to be alive." No. Luke says, "These words seemed to them an idle tale and they did not believe them." The apostle said, "Nonsense. Impossible. He didn't rise." Here were not men who were convincing themselves of something they desperately wanted to happen and Thomas is the same. He is very hard to convince. He is skeptical. He is unbelieving.

I think it's also a great encouragement to our faith and our praying for people we know who haven't yet believed in Jesus. Here's a man who says in verse 25, "I will never

believe." Three verses later, he's on his knees saying, "My Lord and my God." You perhaps know someone, you certainly know someone, you perhaps love someone who is not yet a Christian. Sometimes you are tempted to think it's impossible. They are not going to change now. It's never possible. Here is the skeptic turned into a believer by the Lord Jesus Christ.

But let's come to Thomas and to look first at doubting Thomas. At doubting Thomas. Now, what was it that caused Thomas to doubt? Let me suggest 3 or 4 things. In the first place, I think it was partly a matter of temperament. Partly a matter of temperament. Thomas was a natural pessimist. Thomas was the first one who said there was a cloud in front of every silver lining. Thomas was somebody who always expected the worst. He was sort of an Eeyore of an individual. Do you remember in chapter 11, Jesus wants to go back to Judea and in verse 16 Thomas says, "Let us also go that we may die with him." He doesn't have a cheerful upbeat point of view of things. Chapter 14, he's down in the dumps again, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" It's the way some of us are put together. It's just the way God has made us. It's also something in the Ulster culture. We're natural pessimists. You say to the Ulster farmer, "It's a beautiful day," a look of alarm will cross his face and he will say, "Well, I think it could be working around to rain before the evening." We're people who are reluctant to believe good news. That's not necessarily a simple thing, it's a matter of temperament or character and sometimes the most sensitive and the most conscientious of God's people are like that but if you can believe something happy or something sad, there are people who will always tend to lean toward the sad. They always expect the bad news. They will be very reluctant to believe that something wonderful is going to happen and I think Thomas was a man like that. It was temperament.

Another factor was that he had been absent the previous Lord's day. Verse 24, "Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came." It's a sad statement, isn't it? Think of what he missed. The previous Lord's day, the previous first day of the week, the disciples had been together and Jesus appeared to them and they saw him and they were convinced. We don't know why Thomas wasn't there. It was a pity he wasn't. We're told that the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Thomas missed that by his absence. He missed the blessing. That's something for you to think about when you think about missing a church service. Thomas was not with them when Jesus came. You miss out on some occasion. Sometimes people are absent from the places where faith is strengthened. They don't read their Bibles. They don't come to worship. They don't talk to Christian people. Of course they don't believe. They're not putting themselves in a place where their faith would be challenged and developed and grown.

The third reason we think is Thomas' refusal to listen to his believing friends. We read in verse 25, "The other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.'" But he didn't believe. He's with his friends. He had been with them for 3 years, why would they lie? Why would they mislead him? You have to say to doubters, we have to say to you if you are a doubter, "Do you have Christian friends? Do you think they are honest people? Do you think they would tell you lies? Have you listened to what they say? Have you thought carefully about what they tell you of their experience of Christ?"

Now, the final reason why Thomas doubted was prejudice. Prejudice. He says, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails and place my finger into the mark of the nails and place my hand in his side, I will never," and the Greek is very strong, "I will never, never believe." Thomas says, "It's not enough for me to see him. It's not enough for me to hear him. It's not enough for me to address him. I have got to actually put my finger into the holes in his hand." He set up his own conditions, "I won't be convinced until God answers my questions and provides what I want in the way that I want it." Very often when you talk to people who aren't Christians, they have their own conditions in their mind. "If I have a Damascus Road experience, I will believe. If you can answer this question, I will believe. If you solve this difficulty, I will believe." They lay down their conditions. There are many reasons for doubt. You may have different reasons, basically the natural deadness of the human heart is why we doubt. The most foolish thing you can do is let your destiny be determined by your doubt.

So let's move from doubting Thomas to believing Thomas. Believing Thomas. The first great thing and this is to Thomas' credit, unlike many other people, he wanted to believe. He wanted to believe. Some doubters love their doubt. They cherish it. They feed it. It's their defense against commitment to Christ. If you answer one question, they'll come up with another question. You solve one difficulty, they'll immediately bring up another. They don't want to believe. They prefer to doubt. Thomas wasn't a man like that. He doubted. He wasn't sure he could believe but look what we read in verse 26, "Eight days later, Thomas was with them." Thomas was with them. He met with those disciples. For many people, doubt is an excuse for continuing in sin. For Thomas, it was an agony. He hated doubting. It made him uncomfortable and it made him unhappy. He saw perhaps the joy on the faces of his friends, "Why can I not have that joy? Well, what I am going to do," he said, "I'm going to be with them. I'm going to stay with them. I'm going to see if there is a contagion here. If I can have something with these men. I don't believe that he is risen. I don't believe in their experience but I can't get away from the fact that there is something there and I'm going to be with them." The great thing is not whether you doubt or not, that's comparatively unimportant. The question is: what are you doing about it? Are you feeding it? Or are you trying to overcome it? Are you putting yourself in the place and among the people where your doubts can be answered? That's the great thing to do.

Well, there's something much, much more important than that. Not only, and this is really the key thing, not only did Thomas want to believe, Jesus wanted. Jesus wanted him to believe. As far as I can see from the record, this meeting was for Thomas' benefit alone. There is no other business recorded here. There is no other conversation. It is Jesus and Thomas and he came that evening to convince Thomas and to persuade Thomas. That's the marvelous kindness from the Savior. He didn't grow impatient with Thomas. He didn't say, "Well, he didn't listen to his friends. He didn't listen to the heavens. His heart was hard. I'm finished with him. He has had his opportunity. He is not going to have another one." The Lord said, "I will come again. I will come again when he is there and this time I will persuade him." We can't count on it. We can't say, "I'll just go on doubting and the Lord will come on coming, people on coming and then someday I'll believe." The

Lord is merciful. He had a purpose for Thomas. He had decreed to convince Thomas. It was his will that Thomas came to faith. Friends, that's our ultimate hope for the conversion of every human being. We pray that they will want to believe but more than that, we pray that it will be the Lord's will and purpose to bring them to him. That's the determining factor.

And how did he come to faith? He came to faith through meeting Jesus. Jesus said, "Put your finger here and see my hands and put out your hand and place it in my side." And the commentators differ as to whether Thomas did that or not. Some commentators say yes, Thomas put his finger into the palms of Christ and Thomas put his hand into the side of Christ. I do not believe it. I couldn't believe it. I think it is psychologically unthinkable that Thomas could look at the risen Jesus holding out his hand and saying, "Well, I'll have a good poke in the hole and see if it is real." No, no, no. No, he fell on his knees and he said, "My Lord and my God." His silly little proofs didn't matter. His prejudices were swept away, "Unless I do this, I will never believe." As soon as Jesus appears, it's all blown away like nonsense.

Far, far more compelling is the Christ he met. Look at the knowledge of Christ. He has been reading Thomas' mind. He replays his thoughts. He hadn't been there when Thomas talked to the disciples later that week and yet he quotes Thomas' very words back to him. Thomas had said, verse 25, sometime during the week, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." And Jesus says, verse 27, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side." Thomas is thinking, "How did he know I said that? How did he know I thought that?" Then he realizes, "Jesus reads me like a book. He knows everything about me. He knows what I said. He knows what I thought. Nothing is hidden from him." In the same way, my friends, Jesus knows everything about you and me this evening: every atom of our beings; every thought in our minds; every doubt; every question; every uncertainty; every sin, he knows.

Not only his knowledge but his rebuke. He says to Thomas, "Do not disbelieve." How ashamed must Thomas have felt. How embarrassed. How covered with confusion. Here he is and Jesus says, "You didn't believe them." Thomas has to say, "No, I didn't believe." Is the Lord rebuking you this evening? For some sin? For some failure in faith?

But more than his knowledge and his rebuke is his love. He doesn't banish the doubter from his presence, he comes with a gracious invitation to faith, "Do not disbelieve, but believe. Believe. I am giving you an opportunity. I am overlooking your unbelief. I am forgetting. Here is your opportunity. Believe in me." And that's his gracious call to every one of us here this evening no matter what our doubts may be. Jesus says to you, "Do not disbelieve. Believe. Believe."

And it's Jesus himself who destroys Thomas' doubts forever. Before his eyes is his Master, the Master whom he has known and loved and served and he is there and the ultimate answer to our doubts and fears is Christ himself. Has that been the personal experience of many of us? There were years when we doubted, when we questioned the

Gospel, where we said, "I don't think it's true," and then Christ met us and we saw Christ. We trusted him. And actually, not all of our questions may have been answered and I have lots of things I don't understand about the Bible and there are lots of questions that I would like to have answers to and I haven't got answers. I don't know what they are, I probably will never have an answer. That's not the important thing. The important thing is the reality of Jesus Christ.

Doubting Thomas, believing Thomas and then lastly and briefly confessing Thomas. Confessing Thomas. Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God." The depths of pathos. No eloquent speeches. No fancy words and my guess is that he said them very quietly and very tremblingly, perhaps with tears in his eyes, "My Lord and my God." Yes friends, this is the high point of the whole Gospel. This is the summit. Chapter 21 is sort of an appendix as we will see next week. It's adding on something. This is the climax. And in John's Gospel, the most advanced, the most profound, the most glorious statement of faith anywhere in this Gospel, is made by doubting Thomas, "The last shall be first." He says more than all the rest of them. He gives Jesus the ultimate acclamation. Thomas who was last in faith becomes first in confession and worship. So may you be. So may those who doubt be.

Verse 29, Jesus says, "Have you believed because you have seen me?" Then he speaks about us, "Blessed are those who have not seen," we haven't seen him, "and yet have believed." Is that your confession this evening? Can you say in spite of doubts, in spite of unanswered questions, can you say, "My Lord and my God"? Are you prepared to say, "Not my Lord, not my God"?

And for your confession, others may come to trust in Jesus. John says in verse 31, "these things are written." He's talking about the whole Gospel but he's certainly talking about Thomas. "These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." What glory to God if the overcoming of your doubts should bring many to faith. Amen.

Let us bow our heads in prayer.

O Lord, our God and Savior, you know our minds and our hearts, our innermost thoughts. You know our questionings, our uncertainties, the times when we are mystified and amazed, when we don't understand what is happening to us and we don't understand what you are doing in our lives or why you are doing it and we have many unanswered questions and perhaps at times even doubts and we think too, God, of people in the world, many of them known to us who just haven't come to that place in their lives of trusting Christ and it is our earnest prayer, O God, that you will give us by your Spirit so to see the Lord Jesus in his love, in his holiness, in his knowledge, in his mercy that we will kneel before him and confess to him even now in our hearts, "My Lord and my God." And we pray that through our faith and our testimony, others may believe. We ask it for his sake and joy. Amen.