

The risen Lord and Thomas

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[0 : 00] Gospel according to John, chapter 20, reading at verse 24.

The Gospel according to John, chapter 20, reading verse 24. But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

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.

And after eight days again, the disciples are within, and Thomas with them. And so on, down to the end of verse 29.

O Lord, we read in the New Testament and the Gospels, appeared five times on the day of the resurrection.

[1 : 26] He appeared first of all to Mary Magdalene. Then he appeared to the women who were on the way to Galilee, to tell some of his followers the report of his resurrection.

Then he appeared to Simon, Peter. Then he appeared to the two on the road to Emmaus. These were the four first appearances on the day of the resurrection.

When we met here a fortnight ago, we looked at the appearance of our Lord to the two on the road to Emmaus, and the effect that it had upon them. And they returned excitedly, hurriedly, the seven miles back to Jerusalem, to tell the other disciples, obviously the ten disciples.

The eleven disciples, though, when they reached, they were only, it's possible that there were only ten, they were returned to tell the eleven disciples that they had seen the Lord and that he had spoken to them, that he had had a meal with them, that he had explained the scriptures to them.

This was to be the content of their message to the disciples in the upper room. But when they got there, someone else, as we put it, had stolen their thunder.

[3 : 07] When they went into the room, they were greeted with the news, excited, exciting news from excited disciples. It was, the Lord has risen indeed, and it appeared unto Simon.

And then they compared notes, and they told their story. And it was while they were there together, that the Lord came.

And we read here, and in Luke chapter 24, that that day in the evening, it must have been late at night, because you remember that these two men had said to Jesus on the road, to Emmaus, stay with us because the day is far spent.

But he banished her to their sight, and late though it was, they returned the seven minds of Jerusalem, and so this fifth appearance of Jesus to the disciples gathered in the upper room must have been very late that first evening of the resurrection.

And he came into the presence of these twelve men. The ten disciples plus the two who had been on the road to Emmaus.

[4 : 22] Because we know from this passage, that Thomas was not with them. Thomas was absent. When the Lord appeared for this fifth time to his followers.

But the subject of our study tonight, takes place eight days afterwards. It may be that if you read the account in Luke chapter 24, it may be that the Lord, that Luke means us to understand that the Lord ascended that evening or the very early hours of the morning, as far as, when he led them out as far as to Bethany.

That is the only account that we have in the whole Bible of the ascension. Luke repeats it in the first chapter of the book that he wrote, called the Act of the Apostles.

But in any case, the Bible is silent on the next week or so after the resurrection of Christ.

And the story reopens with this further appearance of Jesus to the disciples eight days after he had appeared to them before.

[5 : 51] This time, Thomas was with them. And it is to the effect that the appearance of Jesus had upon Thomas that we turn and look for a little this evening.

This man, we will have to look at him and ask a question. What kind of man was Thomas? Look secondly, at the mistake that he had made. Thirdly, at the blessing that he received.

Fourthly, at the confession that he made. And finally, at the rebuke that was addressed to him. Now, what kind of man was Thomas?

You know, you and I, we speak of people as doubting Thomases. But there's no doubt that, I have to use the word again, that this man really was perplexed with doubts.

We are indebted to John for two examples that he gives us of his character and of his attitude. The first is in John chapter 11, verse 16, and the second is in John chapter 14, verse 4.

[7 : 07] And they referred to what happened, first of all, at the time of Lazarus' death. Jesus told them plainly that they were going to Bethany, which was in the region of Jerusalem, and that he was going to attend to the situation.

Now, Thomas knew that that kind of journey was fought with danger for the Lord. And he burst in and he said, now he said, we're going to go with you because that's a dangerous mission that you are going on.

He was despondent at the thought of this mission to Jerusalem, and yet he was so totally devoted to Jesus that not astounding his despondency, he was prepared to accompany him.

Then in chapter 14, Jesus tells them that he is going to the Father after his death. Plain teaching unveiled concerning his own death and resurrection.

In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you. And where I go, you know, and the way that I'm taking that place, you know. In other words, you know I'm going to heaven.

[8 : 21] And you know I'm going to heaven by way of the cross. And Thomas again bursts in and he says, Lord, we don't know where you're going. And how can we know the way?

Perfectly illogical to argue like that. If I don't know, if we don't know where you're going, how can we know the way to take to that place? And there he was giving expression to his ignorance, to his inability to understand the Lord's teaching because he couldn't understand it, he was so despondent.

A man who found it difficult to rise above what his own reason was telling him. And he couldn't surrender his personal convictions to impressions that were produced upon the senses of other men.

Here, as we find him the week of the resurrection, after he had missed out on the appearance of the Lord to the disciples, they tell him that the Lord had been seen by him.

But he is adamant in refusing to believe. He just can't bring himself to believe this. He would love to believe it, but he just can't bring himself to believe it.

[9 : 35] And so he makes this condition, yes, I would believe, but only if I see the print of the nails in his hands and if I touch his hands, touch the mark that the nails made and thrust my fist into the hole that the spear of the soldier made and left in his side.

Now, in other words, Thomas was a man who, like many people here maybe tonight, needed more than the evidence and the testimony and the words and the reports and the message of other people.

A man who was quite adamant in the face of compelling evidence. A man who probably fed on his own despondency and on his own misery.

Using the three Ds, he was a dull kind of man, a disappointed kind of man and a disappointed type of man. That was Thomas.

He liked looking on the dark side of things and that's why you speak of someone as a doubting Thomas. He found it extremely difficult to believe.

[11 : 02] What Jesus was going to say to him was this, Thomas, don't persist in not believing.

Now of course we have to make this distinction. There were hundreds of people in Jesus' day, for example, the Pharisees and the Jews, leaders of the Jewish church who refused to believe in him as the Messiah.

Now the difference between them and Thomas was this, they did not want to believe. They remained in unbelief. Thomas would love to believe but he couldn't break out of this air and spirit of despondency.

This sorrowful spirit that seemed to grip him and which he seemed to feed, he just couldn't break out of it. And you can almost hear him saying to himself for these eight days I wish I could believe.

He, I fully, I'm convinced that he envied the disciples, that they had such joy in their lives, that they had been able to believe and he dearly wished he could do the same himself but he couldn't.

[12 : 24] He needed something that he didn't have. And of course there are many people like that. They would want to believe. People who find it difficult to put themselves in the category of an unbelieving world to reject Christ.

Perhaps you like that. It's not that you have anything against the Lord or anything against his cause or anything against his people. As a matter of fact, if you could take your courage in both your hands, you would probably associate and identify yourself with his people.

You see, Thomas did that. He found it so difficult to believe that Jesus had risen and yet he didn't abandon the circle of the believers of Christ.

There was something about Jesus that drew them all together. They knew, the rest knew, and they believed that Jesus was alive.

He didn't. As far as he was concerned, Jesus was dead, yet his devotion to Christ and his communion with the brethren of Christ was real.

[13 : 43] And there are people like that. There are people who find it difficult to break out of this cloud of disbelief. Their inability to accept the testament is presented to them.

They know who they would want to identify themselves with and perhaps they even do that. They know that they do not want to leave the fellowship of the Christian church.

They are in there. But they don't have the joy of the church and they don't have the conviction of the church. But one thing about them is this, they would love to share both the joy and the conviction of the church.

And because they can't, they are despondent and they are often sad, filled with doubts and misgivings about their own spiritual state.

That was the type of man that Thomas was. Now, Thomas was like that. Not just, you see, he was naturally the despondent kind of man who looked on the dark side of things.

[15 : 02] But you see, something happened to Thomas that contributed towards this state of affair. He made a big mistake one day.

And the Bible puts it like this. When Jesus appeared, for that fifth time to the disciples gathered in the upper room, we read that he came in while the doors were shut.

He spoke them, peace be unto you. He showed them his hands and his eyes. They were glad. And then he said to them, as my father has sent me, even so send I you.

Then he breathed on them the Holy Ghost. Then he gave them authority to go out as apostles, saying that day, and this is a reference to church discipline, whosoever sins he remit, they are remitted to them, and whosoever sins he retain, they are redeigned.

He also would read in Luke's gospel, expounded to them, he gave them a sermon from the Old Testament. He must have been with them for a considerable part of that night, as he preached to them and expounded to them the word of God.

[16 : 06] Then he vanished. And then we read this, but Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

He was missing that night. Now we are not told, as we look secondly at the mistake that he made, we are not told why he was absent.

We are not told. There's no point in surmising, there's no point suggesting it's because of this, or because of that, or because of the next thing.

The plain fact is that he was absent while the rest received a blessing. And for a whole week he was alone while the rest rejoiced.

And as they no doubt pummeled him with this information, spoke to him every day, told him about the experience that they had, explained to him what Jesus was like, probably explained to him what his hands looked like and his side.

[17 : 14] And no doubt referred to many of the Old Testament passages that he explained to them, told them about the reference to the Holy Spirit and all that. No doubt bombarded with that for a whole week.

He just couldn't bring himself to believe the Testament. Now then, this is a case, and a classic case, of what happens when people miss out, when they are not where they ought to be.

And one of the simple applications of this is just to explain to you and to illustrate the danger to which every Christian or follower of Christ is exposed when he isolates himself from the company of other Christian people.

You know that it is one of the greatest privileges in life to use every opportunity that you have to associate yourself with Christian company and Christian fellowship.

it is one of the great privileges and at the same time it is a dangerous thing as I said to isolate yourself from them. I came across a reference some time ago to a picture that was displayed at the Paris exhibition of 1889, a painting that depicted a peasant's hut and the poverty of the peasant's family and the sorrow that was associated with that family.

[19 : 05] The scanty belongings of the hut testified to the poverty of the family. The fire had gone out on the hearth, the table was empty and there was a white bundle painted in the corner which depicted death.

the death of the mother and huddled round that a bundle of ill-clad destitute children who were clinging to each other and the whole picture was saying when the mother is dead what can the children do but keep together?

Now the disciples I believe in the first week of the resurrection during the time of our Lord's death and while he was in the grave these three days the picture the Bible gives you of that company of people is a picture of togetherness, picture of union, united first of all in their sorrow and then in their joy.

and the one man who is missing from the company is pictured as a man who is overwhelmed and overtaken by grief and sorrow for a whole week and he missed out on what the others had.

the only application I would like to make of that is this, as long as you have the opportunity, never isolate yourself from the company of Christian people.

[20 : 48] Now I know full well that it is very easy to give place to the excuses that are multiplied in the minds of people for not associating with the people of God.

Let me give you one of them. And you know that you yourselves come across this very often. If you challenge someone to attend the means of grace or to come to church to hear the gospel, very often they will respond in this way, I don't need to come to church.

I can worship God where I am. As a matter of fact all I need to do is go for a walk, I could go to the castle grounds, I can worship God there just as easily as you can worship him in that church in Kennan Street.

I don't need anyone with me to worship God. Well one of the answers to that kind of objection is this, you never ever have that kind of picture printed for you in the word of God.

It is always a picture of people coming together to worship the Lord in the name of Christ. That is always a picture.

[21 : 54] And the best example that this world has ever had of that is the example of Jesus himself. Of whom it is said that on the Sabbath day he went to the synagogue as was his want.

That was his practice. And if he needed that, and I sense he did, do you mean to say that you don't? How many of you here tonight find it easy enough and only too easy at times to make excuses for not coming to the means of grace?

How often is it the case? How often do you find people say and they use it as an excuse and I've heard it said of this congregation itself. Oh, I find the congregation so big I would rather not worship there.

I find the people so cold and so distant. No one talks to me. The minister seems to preach above and over my head. What's the point of going there? Well, if you're a Christian, if you have any desire to be a Christian, if you're probing for the truth, if you would love to believe, if you want to believe, if you want joy in your life, you ought to be where these people are.

And you ought to refuse the excuses that are often presented to you for not being there. And do you know this? Perhaps you ought to think like this.

[23 : 20] If I don't go, what might I be missing out on? What blessing may be there because Jesus promised what two or three are gathered together in my name?

There am I in the midst. You never know what you might be missing. The very night that you absent yourself without a good reason, maybe the very night one is power.

would be poured out upon the gathering of his people. The very night when the word of God would be opened as never before by the presence and the power and the light of the spirit present there.

And that's what happened to Thomas. He wasn't there and he missed out. He missed out. He never heard. probably one of the most wonderful sermons the world has ever heard.

As he opened unto them the scriptures and opened their understanding to the scriptures. He missed out on that great privilege and that great blessing, whatever he meant, whatever it meant, when Jesus breathed on them and said, receive ye the Holy Ghost.

[24 : 39] He missed out on seeing the very thing he wanted to see the print of the nails in his hand and the mark of the spear on his side.

He missed out on sitting down with Jesus as Luke tells us and having a meal in his presence with the rest of the disciples. It must have been a wonderful experience that night, but he missed out.

He missed out. And all I suggest to you is this, that you should be very careful as to what you're missing out on and that you should ask yourself, are you as diligent to the means of grace as you ought to be and as you could be?

Is it the case with you now that your spiritual status reached such a low ebb that it's easier for you to find an excuse to stay away than it is to find an excuse to come to the means of grace?

Is that the case? If it be that you're a convert here tonight and perhaps the temperature of your spiritual life is low, may I remind you of something that used to be true of you?

[25 : 49] You used to make excuses to get to the means of grace. Now you are looking for them to stay away from the means of grace.

grace. And in doing that, you never know what you might be missing out on. And then we read thirdly here the blessing that he received.

Well, the Lord is very gracious. Isn't it a wonderful thing that he never deals with us as we deal with him? Here was a man who had absented himself from the gathering of the disciples.

But eight days later, our Lord does the same thing. He comes to the same room. He comes in while the doors, as far as we know, were closed.

The doors being shut. He stood as he had stood before and he said exactly the same thing. Peace be unto you. He came as he had come before.

[26 : 55] But this time, he came for a different reason. He came specifically, read here in verse 27, to speak to Thomas. 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.

How wonderfully, how gracious the Lord deals with us. Here's a man, Thomas, who was willing to believe, but he couldn't.

So he said. But yet, he had come back into the fellowship that he preferred most of all. Have you noticed that?

Perhaps there have been times in your own life when your spiritual, the spiritual life, you know, ebbs and flows. Perhaps you became a bit lukewarm. And this happens to some people, and we notice it.

People aren't as regular as they used to be in the means of grace, and then in the mercy of God, and in the good providence of God, you see them coming back in. And they make this discovery themselves.

[28 : 09] And what a wonderful thing it is for them that they have made the discovery. That come what may, they know who their company is.

They know where they are happiest. They know where it is best for them to be in the company and in the fellowship of the Lord's people, of Christian people.

And just in case someone may be here tonight who has drifted away, my friend, I counsel you to come back. I counsel you to come back.

Perhaps you've discovered already that you know in your heart of hearts where your interests lie, where your desires are, but maybe you're afraid to come.

Well, you come. And Thomas came and he was where he ought to have been when the Lord revealed himself to him that night.

[29 : 13] And he spoke to him. And he spoke passionately to Thomas because Thomas needed this passionate approach. He spoke to him because, you see, he had denied or he had refused to believe in the company of the disciples.

So he must be brought to a confession of faith in the same place. he must be brought a confession of faith before the same people.

And, oh Lord, and this is a wonderful thing that happened. You may ask, how did Jesus know that Thomas had said this?

You see, Thomas had persistently said to the disciples, except I 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 he had persisted in saying this. And when Jesus stood there, he turned to Thomas and he said, using exactly Thomas' words, reach hither thy finger, look at my hands, reach hither thy hand, thrust your fist into my side, if that's what you want.

[30 : 31] And don't persist in that attitude of faith because of your doom, lack of faith, can become ultimately no faith at all, unbelief, if it is persisted in.

And we have no evidence whatsoever before us here that Thomas did what Jesus told him. He said, unless I do it, and unless I see what I want to see, I will not believe.

And when he was given the opportunity to do as he said, he blotted out this wonderful confession of faith of his, my Lord and my God.

What was it that so overwhelmed Thomas? Well, I believe that one thing did it. one thing, there were other things, but I'm just going to mention this, the omniscience of Jesus, by omniscience I mean, we mean the knowledge, the complete, the total, absolute knowledge that Jesus has as the Son of God.

God knows all things. There is nothing unknown to the Almighty, and here he is in our nature, standing in the presence of these disciples, and he says to Thomas, look, I know what you said, and I know what you have asked for.

[32 : 13] I offer you know as the ground of your belief to do what you want to do. Have you yourself ever been struck by the omniscience of God?

Have you come to know from time to time that God knows everything about you? Let me give you a simple example of what I mean. You see, there are times when you and I think things about our spiritual state.

We may think things about the Bible. Maybe we wonder about what our own spiritual condition is, and what we would want and what we would need and what we would love.

And we may even talk about these things to other people. You come to church or perhaps you go into Christian company and lo and behold, almost everything you are talking about, even down to the very words that you used, are heard by you from the pulpit or from some other source.

And you react in this way, how could he have known what I was saying or what I was thinking? How could he have known that? Perhaps other people go a step further and they think that someone has told the minister what has happened.

[33 : 39] But that's not the case, my friend. God's omniscience has come to light for you there. He has directed someone to speak in that way to meet you need.

And how often it does meet down it. That's one of the benefits and one of the blessings of Christian company and Christian fellowship. Very often the very thing that you talk about, and maybe you don't understand it all that well, but you want to talk about it.

Very often the very thing that you're talking about will be explained to you in a pulpit or from other sources at the very next gathering, the very next time you meet around the word of God.

It's a good sign when people do gather and it's far better I believe for the spiritual benefit and the spiritual blessing of people in this congregation itself if there were more gatherings than there are.

I don't know how many gatherings, I don't know how often people gather around the word of God for Christian fellowship, I don't know, myself. But I think it would be a good thing if there were these things, spontaneously.

[34 : 50] And because you would see the benefit yourself from meeting like that. And I'm sure of this, that the pulpit would benefit from it as well. And that you would then benefit from the pulpit.

This is the way it works. God meet your needs. You see, Thomas wasn't the only one who stood dumbfounded in the place of the Lord and said, I wonder how he knew that I had said this.

How did he know that I had asked for this? And the Lord in his mercy and his graciousness meets him to strengthen his faith.

And then there bursts from his lips this confession of faith. And one moment he rises from the very depth of despair, as someone has put it, to the very pinnacle of faith.

My Lord, the one who owns me, my master, my Lord, whom I want to serve, my God, whom I want to worship, before whom I submit and bow myself, my Lord and my God.

[36 : 03] Jesus does not repress the outburst. Jesus approves the expression of this faith. But he says something to him, Thomas, because you have seen, you have believed.

You have believed. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. And here is great encouragement for you and for me, and a great lesson as well.

what he is saying to Thomas is this, Thomas, if only you had believed what you heard from your disciples, you would have been more blessed than you are.

If only you had believed the testimony, you wouldn't have been eight days in doubt and in despondency and in dismay. You would have rejoiced with themselves if only you had believed.

what you heard. And he says this, these are the people who are blessed, not the people who have seen and believed, but the people who have not seen and believed.

[37 : 19] How many of you here tonight believe that? How many of you say, oh, if only I would see, if only I would see a miracle. Perhaps if I saw something wonderful tonight on the wall of this church in this building, when I go home, going along, street, I want to see something, I want to hear of eyes, or I want to feel, and I won't believe till I see, till I hear, until I feel the way that I think I ought to feel before I can become a Christian.

I couldn't believe. Well, my friend, that's not the way you're going to believe. You have to believe what the word tells you, the evidence of the word of God.

God, there is no other way in which you can come to faith. And remember what Jesus here says, these are the people who are blessed.

If I took you just now through a brief survey of the history of the Old Testament, looked at such men as Abraham, Noah, Jacob, just looked at these men and asked, what do you think?

Do you think if you had had the privileges that they had that you would believe tonight? Well, just for a minute. It won't take a minute.

[38 : 40] Think of Abraham. God called that man out of idolatry. He was an idol worshipper and out of the Chaldees. And he called him and he said to him, Abraham, follow me.

And Abraham went out and he followed God. Mind you, God gave Abraham signs. Over the years, he would take him out and he would point in the stars and the sky and say to him, Abraham, there you are, there's the evidence of sight, one of the senses.

Look at that. I tell you that your seed is going to be as numerous and more numerous than the stars. He took him to the beach. He had to look at the sand and he said to him, Abraham, do you see these grains of sand?

I tell you that your seed, your spiritual seed, the church that is yet to be in this world, will be more numerous than the sand on the seashore there.

Abraham believed God. If the Lord took you tonight, it was a clear night that you took on the bra and he said, do you look at these stars? I tell you, whoever you are, I tell you that the people who are going to descend from you, descended from you, if this world continues for the next thousand years, they are going to become Christians.

[39 : 57] There will be so many of them, more than you can see in the sky. Then maybe took across the other side to Brian, he showed you all the sand there, and he said to you, do you see that sand?

I tell you that you're going to know more Christians than the number of sand, grains of sand there. You would go home tonight, you probably wouldn't sleep, but hardly wait for the morning so that you could meet people and tell them what the Lord had shown you and said to you.

That's the kind of way you and I think, isn't it? We think because if only we could see things, and if only we could feel, and if only we could hear, you see, we're dependent on the senses, aren't we?

we but my friend, what God says to you and to me is this, all you will ever get is a testimony of the word of God, and the word of God is as clear to you tonight as the stars in the sky, it's as clear as any grains of sand on any beach, and it says to you that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, it bids you come to faith on the evidence of that testimony, it bids you accept what God says, and it says this to you, that these are the people who are blessed, the people who are truly happy, those for whom and in whom and God and through whom God is really working, are the people who hear the word of God, who believe the word of God and who do what the word of God tells them to do.

There was a great theologian in America called Dr. Archibald Alexander and in a theological college, one of the students was going through a time of great doubt, conflict in his mind, he was very distressed and he went to the professor one day and he told him that he had reached a stage where he was now doubting if he had ever been converted and Dr.

[42 : 25] Alexander looked at him and he said to him, now he says, you know what repentance is, it's abandoning your sin for Christ.

You know what faith is, faith is looking away from yourself to Jesus. Now you think that you were once converted, you think that you thought that you repented once and that you believed once, well no, you're doubting it.

Well he says, don't fight your doubts, go all over it again. If you know what repentance is, repent now.

If you know what faith is, believe now. If you're doubting whether you gave yourself to Christ so many years ago, well don't bother about that, the point is you give yourself to Christ now and let your doubts go.

If you have not been his disciple before, well, become his disciple now. Don't fight the devil on his own ground.

[43 : 40] Choose the ground of Christ's righteousness and Christ's atonement and fight the devil from there. Now then how many of us need that advice tonight?

How many here may be perplexed with doubts, worrying and wondering about this, that, the next thing? Did I?

Was I? Did I have or what not? My friend, that's not the point. The point is that Christ as our saviour is available now. And if you have problems about what you did in the past, they can vanish.

If you accept the testimony that comes to you now, blessed are they who have not seen and believe.

Not those who have believed, but those who do believe. Have you ever felt like that yourself? Does the word of God bring you anew to that place where you want to believe, where the evidence and the testimony that all that you will ever have is there before you in the word of God spelt out clearly.

[45 : 01] And this word brings you to this point yet again. Speaks to you as a sinner. And it comes to you with that exhortation believe and be saved.

And if you're going to wait until you see something, until you hear something, until you feel something, you will never come to faith. the testimony and the evidence is there for you to accept.

And if you persist in disbelief, as Jesus told Thomas, you remember where that could very well end up in your life, in an obstinate unbelief, in the face of the most telling evidence.

Let us pray. Our Lord, we bless thee. We bless thee for thy care and thy compassion. We thank thee for the provision of thy grace, for thy love.

Oh, do thou help us to put our trust in thee. Throw us in the exercise of our faith to thyself, in a new commitment of heart and life.

[46 : 28] And bless to us the testimony of thy word. Part us tonight with thy blessing. And forgive graciously all our sins, for Jesus' sake.

Amen.