

Sermon – 29/04/2007 am

Jesus Appears to Thomas

Study Text: John 20:24-28

They say a week is a long time in political life. A week is also a long time in spiritual life. Have you tried going for a week without reading your Bible? What about when you miss coming to worship on the Lord's Day. You see your life start to go downhill. You begin to miss the blessings of the Lord.

Thomas certainly missed out on a great blessing when he was absent from the meeting of the disciples on the day Jesus rose from the dead. While his fellow disciples spent the whole week quietly rejoicing after seeing the Lord, Thomas spent the week in doubt and unbelief.

Unbelieving Thomas

The disciples, minus Thomas, were huddled together in a locked room on Sunday evening. That morning some had seen the empty tomb where Jesus had been buried. Reports of sightings of the risen Jesus kept coming in during that day. In the evening Jesus appeared in this locked room saying 'peace be with you'. The initial shock turned to joy as they realised this really was Jesus risen from the dead.

But where was Thomas. He was not present that evening. He may have had good reason to be absent – but then again he may not. Whatever the reason he was not present and he missed a great blessing. He missed seeing the risen Jesus. The disciples told him *we have seen the Lord* but Thomas did not believe them.

What sort of man was Thomas? We learn more about him from this passage than any other place in Scripture. Only John records this appearance of Jesus to Thomas. Back when Jesus got news that Lazarus was sick and decided to go back to Judea, Thomas expressed some doubt about the safety of going back (11:16). The Jews had tried to kill Jesus and he escaped across the Jordan. But then he decided to go back among these Jews. Thomas thought this unwise but reluctantly followed.

On another occasion Thomas questioned Jesus about where he was going (14:5). When Jesus spoke about returning to his Father's house Thomas said *Lord we do not know where you are going*. Thomas was not the sharpest of students; but then again none of the disciples understood what Jesus was telling them when he said I am going away and where I go you cannot come (13:33).

Most people know of Thomas as 'doubting Thomas'. In India some know him as the apostle who brought the gospel to India. Although solid historical evidence is lacking there is a church in south India called the Mar Thoma church which dates back a long time.

The nickname 'doubting Thomas' seems a bit unfair, but is probably well known because people see themselves in this character. Thomas is a man before his time. It is modern man who is characterised by doubt and scepticism. 'If I can't see it does not exist' is the motto of modern man. This is a very foolish philosophy for we believe in so much that we cannot see. We believe

in atoms and electrons. We believe in so much that we hear – we believe the ice caps are melting but have you seen these ice caps. We believe those who have witnessed these things.

So many people are like Thomas. ‘Unless I see I will not believe’. Despite the witness of his close friends he still would not believe that Jesus was risen from the dead. There is a sense of pride and even arrogance in the attitude of Thomas. It is easy to be a sceptic and easy to be proud of being a sceptic. Thomas asked questions but did he stop to listen.

We all know people who keep coming up with questions, not because they want to learn but because they want to entrench their own position of unbelief. It is very dangerous position to adopt. Thomas could well have cut himself off from the disciples and from Jesus himself.

Gracious Jesus

After eight days the disciples were again together – probably in the same room and at the same time. Is there any significance in this meeting being on the Sunday again? Looking back, John may well have noticed how Jesus appeared on one Sunday and then again on the next. The Christians were meeting on the first day of the week when John wrote this gospel.

Thomas made sure he was present at this subsequent meeting. It was a hard week for him. While all his friends quietly rejoicing, he was despondent, knowing no joy. They knew Jesus was alive. Thomas believed he was still dead. As Paul would later declare ‘those who do not believe in the resurrection and have hope in Christ only in this life are of all men most pitiable’ (I Corinthians 15:19).

His fellow disciples exhorted Thomas to believe, but he refused. He would not believe them. They might well have rejected him for such arrogance and unbelief. They might well have kept him out of their meetings. But they graciously welcomed him. Unbelief is everywhere today. Believers must be gracious in dealing with the unbeliever.

Jesus was most gracious in dealing with Thomas. When he appeared to the disciples after a week, entering the room through locked doors once again, he had a special message for Thomas. He greeted them all with *Peace to you* but then stood before Thomas and spoke to him. He showed Thomas his nailed pierced hands and his spear pierced side.

He invited him to put his finger in the nail prints and his fist in the spear wound. He was ready to satisfy the very demands that Thomas had made when refusing to believe. It was almost as if Jesus had heard his bold demand. Of course the all-knowing and all-seeing Son of God did hear.

‘I saw you when you were under the fig tree’ Jesus said to Nathanael. ‘Rabbi you are the Son of God’ was Nathanael’s response (1:48). *Here is a man who told me everything I ever did* said the woman at the well (4:29). *Could this be the Christ* she said with conviction. Thomas was taken aback even more when Jesus whom he last saw dead appeared to him and spoke as if he had heard what Thomas said to the disciples.

What amazing grace, what great condescension, we see in this invitation extended to Thomas. *Put your finger here* said Jesus and *reach your hand here*. Jesus had suffered and died for him. He wanted him to believe. He was willing to let Thomas touch the very wounds on his body if this would help him believe. Jesus is so patient; He is so full of grace.

Do you know the depth of his grace towards you? Do you know that amazing grace which Thomas knew and which John Newton wrote of? How often have you doubted? How often have you said 'Jesus does not love me, he does not care about me'. If you feel unloved, if you doubt the grace of Jesus Christ then be assured it is not because his grace is insufficient. The problem is with you in not seeing, and not receiving, his grace.

Paul was suffering from ailment and prayed to the Lord to heal him. The Lord answered *my grace is sufficient for you*. The grace of Jesus is always sufficient for you. May you recognise and receive his grace as Paul did – and as Thomas did also.

Confession of Thomas

We have come to one of the most profound verses of Scripture (20:28). What could Thomas say as the risen Jesus stood before him inviting him to put his finger in the nail prints and his fist into this spear pierced side? There was no doubting this was Jesus in bodily form. There was no questioning these gracious words of Jesus.

Did Thomas do as he declared he must, and as he was invited to do by Jesus? Some think he did, but it was no longer necessary. The very sight and the very words of Jesus would have been sufficient to elicit the confession that Thomas makes. We see a man who was totally humbled, a man who was filled with shame for having said what he did a few days before.

He was overcome as he stood before... stood before who? Who was this man with nailed pierced hands and a spear pierced side? It was none other than Jesus of Nazareth who was dead but was now alive.

All Thomas could utter was the words *my Lord and my God* (20:28). This was all he needed to utter. He had no more questions. He had no more doubts. He did not ask for more proof. He simply confessed Jesus as Lord. He confessed Jesus as God.

Here is a Jew, a strict monotheist, worshipping Jesus when the law stated 'you shall worship no other God but me'. Here is a Jew confessing Jesus as God. From the beginning – *the word was with God and the word was God* – to the end of this gospel the message is the same – Jesus is God, he is God the Son. How anyone can read this gospel and deny the divinity of Jesus is incomprehensible.

Jesus made no attempt to correct Thomas in what he confessed. Peter immediately stopped Cornelius from worshipping him (Acts 10:25) and Paul quickly stopped the pagans in Lystra from worshipping him (Acts 14), but Jesus made no move to stop Thomas worshipping him as Lord and God. Surely we must conclude that Jesus accepts worship and in fact demands to be worshipped as Lord and God.

Do not be unbelieving but believe said Jesus. Do not make excuses like Thomas. He seemed so clever in his own eyes. Sometimes people repeat clever objections to the gospel. They are not able to bring their own questions so come with those of others. Anyone who comes sincerely and is ready to listen will hear the voice of Jesus saying come; see my hands see my side. Yes I died for you and I rose again that you might live.

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