

Series: Resurrection Experiences

Text: John 20

Message #3 (of 4)

## **THE RESURRECTION AND THE APOSTLE THOMAS**

### **(What does it take for us to believe?)**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

1. Even those with little Bible background may very well have identified doubting with the Apostle Thomas in the Bible. I can remember hearing people speak of so and so being a “doubting Thomas” before I knew the Bible story on which such a comparison was based.
2. What was Thomas’ problem, and why was he so resolute against believing that the resurrection of Jesus had actually occurred? Even the testimony of the other disciples was not enough to convince him. Their faith was based solidly on credible evidence, but Thomas wasn’t buying! Since Thomas was not present in the Upper Room that first resurrection Sunday evening, he did not see Jesus when He appeared. However, the other disciples had communicated to him that they had seen the Lord with their own eyes. There should be no doubt. These men were trustworthy associates, but that did not matter either.
3. What did it take for Thomas to believe? Perhaps a more significant question today might be, “What does it take for anyone to believe?” I think the answer to this lies in Jesus’ appearance to and conversation with Thomas. Let’s tune in giving our attention to the passage before us. First we will analyze what was behind Thomas’ refusal to believe. Then we will make an effort to understand what Jesus explained to Thomas. Finally we will see what it takes for us to move from doubt and/or refusal to a confident, certain faith.

#### **I. ANALYZING THE PROBLEM – Why Thomas refused to believe**

- A. What Thomas believed (Thomas did have some strong convictions that are commendable)
  1. Thomas believed that to follow Jesus was worth one’s life (John 11:16). The heat was on. It was not safe for Jesus to travel to Judea. In verse 8 of chapter 11, the disciples

reminded Jesus that the Jews (Jewish leaders) were seeking to stone Jesus. To return to Judea was to walk into harms way with a strong probability of death. If you were Jesus' disciple, would you have wanted to accompany Him to a funeral – which might turn out to be your own! Thomas was committed enough to Jesus that he declares to the others, “Let us go that we may die with him.” Whatever else we might say about Thomas, he was willing to risk his life to follow Jesus. And that is exactly what he did.

2. Thomas believed that Jesus was the source of one's direction and destination (John 14:5). We go now to the Upper Room the night before Jesus was crucified. Jesus was preparing the disciples for His departure. Jesus proclamation, “where I am you may be also” sounded very good to Thomas, but he was not certain where Jesus was going nor how he would be able to get to where Jesus was. Whatever else we can say about this, and I will say more in a minute, Thomas believed that Jesus was the One he should follow and that to follow Him was to go in the direction that should be traveled. Unlike many, Thomas was very clear as to whom he should follow and he wanted very much to follow Jesus.
3. Thomas believed that the living Lord Jesus was the only real source of faith and hope (John 20:25). Very likely on the evening of resurrection Sunday, Thomas learned from the others that Jesus had risen and had appeared to the group in the Upper Room, but Thomas was not present when this happened. He uttered a very strong statement concerning what he would accept and what would be unacceptable in order for him to believe that Jesus was alive. What this does say is that Thomas was willing to trust the Lord, willing to believe Him and follow Him anywhere, even to death, but he would not give his life for a lie or a rumor. He had to know for sure that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. So, before we are too hard on Thomas, remember what he does believe. Now with a faith strong enough to die for and a desire so strong that one would follow anywhere and a commitment that no substitute or possibility was good enough – absolute certainty mattered – why was Thomas so reluctant to embrace what he so much desired would be true?

#### B. What Thomas feared

1. Thomas feared that Jesus would die and he would be left alone (John 11:16). The confidence when he was with Jesus evaporated when he considered Jesus' departure. To Thomas, it would be better to die with Jesus than to remain alive without Him. He could not bear the thought of existing without Jesus!
2. Thomas feared that Jesus would leave and he would have no clear direction where to go (John 14:5). As the imminent departure of Christ becomes more evident, Thomas prepares for panic. Jesus announced that He was going away, but that His departure would not be permanent. He promised to come again to receive the disciples to Himself. That part surely sounded good to Thomas, but then Jesus said, "You know the way to where I am going." Lights and sirens go off! Panic time has arrived. Thomas does not know the way! (We don't even know where you are going! How are we going to know the way to you when you do return?)
3. Thomas feared that Jesus resurrection would not be real and he could not bear such devastation (John 20:25). The dreaded day came. Jesus had been crucified. He was gone. Thomas was alone. His worst nightmare had been realized. He was devastated. But the disciples were telling a different story. Could it be true? I am sure Thomas wanted it to be true. He would give anything if it was true, but he would not allow himself hope if there was any chance of having those hopes dashed to pieces. He could not endure any further disappointments! Do you understand the problem?

**II. UNDERSTANDING THE EXPLANATION – "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"** You know the account here in chapter 20. For a week Thomas had been torn, wanting to believe but refusing to believe. His words, presumably on the evening of resurrection Sunday, are intense: "Unless I see...and place my hand...**I will never believe.**" Now as Thomas is gathered with the others in the Upper Room, Jesus appears! Listen to what He offers Thomas!

A. What Jesus offered Thomas

1. Certain revelation – The doors are locked, presumably still out of fear of what the Jews might do to them. But in an undisclosed manner, in walks Jesus. It was hardly an hallucination. Thomas refused to believe without greater certainty, and here is Jesus in the flesh. It was no longer the testimony of another. It was a personal experience.

2. Empirical proof – Jesus knew the heart of Thomas (not to mention the words spoken by Thomas). In language nearly identical to that which Thomas declared a week earlier, Jesus tells Thomas to put his finger on the wounds of His hands and his hand on the wound in His side. In doing so, Jesus calls Thomas to end his disbelief by believing that He indeed had arisen from the dead. When Thomas demanded to see the prints of the nails and the scar from the wound in the side, he was saying that there had to be continuity with what he saw and the Jesus who was crucified. He had to be sure this was really Jesus! The scars would provide such proof. Jesus accommodates that demand. In effect Jesus proved to His disciples that He would hear them even when He was not present, and at the same time He removed all possible grounds to remain in unbelief. That’s what He offered Thomas. He also had something to teach Thomas.

#### B. What Jesus taught Thomas

1. The place of revelation – The revelation of the resurrection was necessary for true faith. Revelation may come in various forms. Here the revelation was an actual appearance of Jesus. “Have you believed because you have seen me?”, might be a question, as is translated in the ESV, or it might be a statement, as translated in the NIV. Either is possible, but in either case, I don’t think it was necessarily a rebuke. If Thomas had been present on that first Sunday evening, he would have seen the Lord and this conversation would not have happened. But in the providence of God, it did happen, and we benefit from it. Faith comes from hearing (or reading) and hearing from the Word of God (that’s revelation). Revelation was necessary for true faith. It is not mere faith but faith in something, and the something makes all the difference. In this case the something was the resurrected Lord.
2. The purpose of evidence – Do we need signs and wonders to believe? Jesus had spoken against such a demand in 4:48. Again, it is not likely that Jesus is criticizing Thomas’ faith here. The fact is, Thomas did believe. Granted it was a result of his seeing the risen Lord, but he believed nonetheless. The evidence of a resurrected Lord confirmed the testimony of others that He was alive. While evidence does not produce faith, it certainly confirms faith.

3. The pattern of faith (see and believe vs. believe and see). Jesus now looks beyond this time to a few days later when He would ascend into heaven. The faith of future followers of Jesus would not be formed around a personal appearance of Christ, but rather through the revelation of God given to the apostles and written down for us. That is the point of verses 30-31. “Thomas, you believe because you see me. Blessed are those who will believe without seeing.” Their sight will be through the testimony of others who have recorded the revelation – the Word of God.

### **III. EMBRACING THE SOLUTION – “My Lord and my God”**

#### **A. Eyes opened**

1. There were seven days of darkness in the company of believers! When Jesus appeared, the darkness gave way to wonderful light. There was no bewilderment on the part of Thomas now. He knew for certain and declared clearly who Jesus was!
2. There were seven days of resistance in the company of confidence. The others apparently had contacted Thomas the very night Jesus first appeared to them, but he would not believe. Their confidence was high. They were certain of His resurrection. Thomas remained unconvinced.
3. A week of defiant unbelief was shattered in a moment with the appearance of the Savior. Is this not the way it is in the lives of those who do not believe in the resurrected Lord? Regardless of the company or the confidence of that company the eyes of the unbeliever remain closed both by the judicial act of God and by the choice of the unbeliever. They won't believe and they can't believe. But when Jesus opens the eyes, faith comes!

#### **B. Deity declared**

1. As one author expressed it, “The most unyielding skeptic has bequeathed to us the most profound confession.” Our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior is faith in precisely who He is. As Thomas declared, He is Lord and God, absolute sovereign and undiminished deity.
2. Faith in a diminished Jesus is no faith at all. He is God and only as God can He save. To believe in Jesus as less than He is, is to have an insufficient faith, a faith that cannot save, a faith that is without value.

### C. Faith accomplished

1. There was faith expressed in who Jesus was. If you want a picture of what coming to faith is, you have it here in this response. When John writes in verses 30-31 that these things were written that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing we might have life through His name – Thomas illustrates that declaration.
2. There was faith expressed in what Jesus did. By Thomas' words, he affirmed the work Christ had accomplished on the cross and the need he had for such work to be accomplished. Thomas placed himself under the authority and in the hands of his Lord and his God. We must do no less.

### CONCLUSION

1. What is your declaration to Jesus Christ today? Can you say with confident assurance, “My Lord and my God”, and do so with an understanding of what that actually means? If so, rejoice. If not, may God open your eyes that you might understand the revelation He has given us in His word about who He is and what He has done.
2. As we share the Gospel, do not be surprised when others cannot see, when they refuse to believe, when they blow off our testimony, and when they are unable to process the clear evidence of the truth of salvation in Christ. May we find great encouragement in John 20:30-31.
3. It is in the revelation of the Gospel of Christ and in the work of the Holy Spirit of God that eyes are opened and faith comes. Thomas believed. We came to faith in Christ by the same path. Surely many others to whom we make known the Gospel will also believe. May God help us to live our lives as those who profess of Christ, “My Lord and my God!”
4. 1 Peter 1:8-9