

**John 20: 24-29; “Thomas’ Lessons of Faith Learned”, An Easter Sunday Afternoon
Sermon Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall at Premier Estates
Nursing Home on April 9th, 2023.**

Those who know the Lord are called to live by faith and not by sight. But sometimes even a believer in Christ can fall into an unbelief which is a kind of stubborn refusal to look at the evidence for Christ’s resurrection. And so, they doubt His power to persuade them at all, that He really is alive. This is dishonoring to God and to our Savior. “Unless I see, I will not believe,” he says. He had already heard the testimony of his fellow Apostles saying that they had seen the Lord. And so, as we take a look at Thomas’ disappointed reaction to Christ’s death, we want to see, 1st of all – That unbelief can lead to a stubborn refusal to believe the testimony of other Christians. Then 2nd – Unbelief needs to be gently reproofed. And 3rd – That there is a blessing for those who do not yet see Christ, and yet they believe.

1st – We need to see that unbelief can lead to a stubborn refusal to believe the testimony of other Christians. (verses 24 and 25)

It says in verse 24 – “Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.” We must ask the question, for it begs for an answer; why was Thomas not with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them the first time? Why was he missing at that important point? I think that it was because of his unbelief. The particular form of unbelief that he fell into consisted of not believing in the testimony of other believers; and instead, he thought that he had to figure it all out for himself. He was trusting to his own understanding and judgment rather than thinking that he might need to receive and believe the testimony of others.

Sometimes unbelief develops in us because other believers have spiritual experience which we do not want to recognize, or we are unwilling to receive. We can’t figure out why they should have experience or knowledge that we don’t have. Sometimes believers fall into pride of understanding in this way, and it leads them to unbelief. They are unwilling to receive the observations and testimony of others at critical points and thus their faith suffers. Actually, Thomas had forgotten many of the things that Jesus had said to him which would have strengthened him in his faith at this point, if he had believingly called them to mind.

He didn’t call to mind Jesus’ own words and His testimony to him. In John 14 Jesus had said to them, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.” “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 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” “And where I go you know and the way you know.” And Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?’ “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life.’” “No one comes to the Father except through Me.” You can see Thomas’ confusion at this point. How can we know the way? The way is believing in Jesus and the promises that He gives.

In John 16: 16 Jesus mentions His leaving again. He says, “A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.” “Then some of His disciples said among themselves, ‘What is this that He says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me; and ‘because I go to the Father?’” “They said therefore, ‘What is this that He says, ‘A little while?’” “We do not know what He is saying.” “Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, ‘Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, “A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me?’” “Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.” (Verse 22) “Therefore you will have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.”

Now this is something that Thomas and some of the others had forgotten, or not sufficiently considered. And this is why Thomas fell into faithlessness at this point. When he saw Jesus die on the cross; when he saw the nails driven into Jesus' hands and feet and blood coming out; when towards the last he saw the Roman soldier with his spear make that dreadful hole in his side plunging it up into his heart, he probably said to himself, "Well that is the end of everything." "Now that Jesus is dead, and there is no bringing him back; I am finished with following this cause." "There is no use fooling myself with hopes that will not come to pass." "He is not coming back." "Jesus is dead and the kingdom is destroyed."

But this was a sheer denial of all that Jesus had taught him and lived before him for 3 and a half years. He was just sorrowful enough and grief-stricken enough to think to himself, "Well, I might as well get away and be by myself now." "I don't want to fool myself by believing the fables which the others are making up, about the Lord being risen." And so he left the other 10 when he understood that some of them were still trying to insist that Jesus was risen, when he couldn't believe that it was possible.

This was a believer in Jesus, and an apostle, no less, falling into unbelief. It was that same unbelief that led him to stay away from the meeting with the other disciples that evening of Jesus' resurrection. He was not there, not because he couldn't have been there. He wasn't there because He couldn't believe what they were saying, or the things that they were rejoicing in. And because he wasn't there; he missed the first appearing of Jesus to the other apostles and disciples. It is good for us to realize that Christ knew all about Thomas' unbelief, and that He would take deliberate steps to address it.

He would personally show Himself to Thomas in a way that would resolve all of his difficulties. He can do the same for you, if only you will have receive the testimony of the Scriptures and other Christians who have the assurance of salvation.

Now, 2nd – Unbelief needs to be gently reproved. (verses 26-28)

That first evening, when Christ appeared to the rest, Thomas had not been with them. We have seen how he hurt himself by falling into unbelief. But now we will see the Lord retrieve him from his unbelief and faithlessness, as He will every one of His own. We read in verse 25b, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger in to the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." Beloved, has this kind of unbelief ever happened to you? What terrible unbelief it was. Have you ever placed unreasonable conditions on your faith, such as Thomas did here? "Unless I see such and such", I will not believe.

This is nothing other than stubbornness of heart. How foolish it was then, and even is now, to think that the Lord should have to reveal Himself physically and personally to every believer to convince them that He is alive. It would become a full time job for the Lord. Instead, He expects us to listen to the testimony of others to the power of the risen Christ and to believe in our heart that the same experience of Christ that they have had, may be ours by faith as well. And yet, let us see how tender and gentle Jesus was with Thomas.

Verse 26 – "And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them." "Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!'" "Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side.'" "Do not be unbelieving, but believing." "And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'" You can see here that the Lord Jesus took Thomas up on all of his conditions which he had laid out in his unbelieving mind. He didn't have to reveal Himself to Thomas in this way, but He knew Thomas, and He knew that if He stood in front of him and repeated back to him in his very words, the conditions which Thomas had stipulated, that he would not only be convinced, but that he would be sufficiently convicted and ashamed of his unbelief. The conditions included Thomas' putting his finger in the nail prints in his hands; of reaching with his hand and putting it into his side.

But Jesus knew that Thomas would not need to do that if He spoke to him in this gentle way of reproof. You see, Thomas was not only immediately convinced, but he was immediately repentant. He was not only immediately convinced, but he was immediately ready to confess Him openly as his Lord and his God. What a beautiful scene this must have been for everyone there to behold. The Lord knew what Thomas would need to become a fervent witness to Himself. He knew what situations of difficulty that he would have in his witness later in his life; when he would lay down his life for the gospel in India.

Tradition has it that that is where he went and he suffered great persecution and martyrdom for his Lord. This appearance was everything he needed to equip him for his future ministry. Let us learn from this that our faith is something that needs to be nourished and strengthened in order for us to go on to serve our Christ. Our Lord Jesus will come to us and help us with this as we believe in His words, and in His promises, and in the testimony of the experience of other believers; which they give to us, telling us of His wonderful power at work in their lives.

And 3rd – There is a blessing for those who do not yet see Christ, and yet they believe.

Verse 29 – “Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed.” “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” So, we see from Christ’s words here, that there is a special blessing to those who will live by faith in the unseen Christ. Blessed are those who have not seen the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ; and yet they still believe. The reality of Christ’s resurrection and His presence does not have to be proved to the believing disciple now, in a fleshly way. They know that they will one day behold Him face to face. Rather, let us understand from this special Beatitude that every believer who is walking by faith, who is walking closely with Christ even now, they are like the disciples described by Peter in 1st Peter 1: 8.

It says there – “...whom having not seen you love.” “Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.” Do you believe in Christ in this wonderful way; rejoicing in Christ, knowing that He is in you, and with you, and for you, and that He will never leave you nor forsake you? Lo, He is with you always even to the end of the age. If you do not know the reality of this walking with the unseen Christ now; you surely may, if you will ask Him to come into your heart and save you from all of your sins. Those who will pray and ask Him will come to know the reality of His presence and power in their lives. This gift of salvation and eternal life comes for the asking.

When you ask Him, He sends His blessed Holy Spirit to come and live with you forever. He becomes Christ in you, the hope of glory. I am thankful for my Savior and Lord; that He is with me always. On a plaque in my dining room these words are written: “Christ is the head of this house, the unseen Guest at every meal, the silent listener to every conversation.” He is risen indeed, and we are blessed indeed if we believe in Him, if we seek Him with all of our heart, and have fellowship with Him day by day. He, our unseen Risen and Ascended Lord, beholds us personally, even now! You can walk with Him by faith, and learn to obey Him out of love, and eventually you will see Him face to face someday.