

John 20:24-29

Introduction

Easter day – a triumphant day. We celebrate the Lord’s victory over sin and death. His people have triumphed in Him.

Scripture reading contains two of the most famous figures in the Easter story, Mary, who calls the Lord “Master”, and Thomas, who calls Jesus “My Lord and my God”. We would gladly echo these two confessions this morning.

We are going to concentrate on Thomas. Not much is known about him. He is in all the lists of the apostles, but the only details we get are recorded in John’s gospel. His name is Thomas in Hebrew, and Didymus in Greek, both meaning “twin”. We do not know anything about his twin, or his occupation, or how and when Jesus called him.

We know more about his temperament and character. We often refer to him as “doubting Thomas”, but it has to be said that sometimes we are harsher than the Bible is. Thomas was not the only disciple who had doubts on occasions. Remember that the other disciples had to be shown Jesus’ hands and side before they believed, and the disciples on the road to Emmaus were described as **fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken** (Luke 24:25).

The character of Thomas

It is a matter of great satisfaction and encouragement that the disciples of Jesus were not all the same. They clearly had different natures and different personalities. They were not ideal characters. This truth keeps us from despair about ourselves. Yet Jesus still called them and made something of them by His grace. The power of the gospel is seen in all of them.

Thomas was a man intensely devoted to Christ. When news of Lazarus’s death reached Jesus, and He proposed to go to Lazarus, Thomas said, **Let us also go that we may die with Him** (John 11:16). Bethany was near Jerusalem, and there was a good chance that Jesus would be caught and killed. But Thomas was willing to be killed with Him; such was his love and devotion for Jesus.

He was dull and slow to understand, and not satisfied till he got to the truth of the matter. In the Upper Room when Jesus was speaking about the Cross and what lay beyond, and telling the disciples that they knew the way He was going, it was Thomas who said, **Lord, we know whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?** (John 14:5). It was in reply to this that Jesus said, **I am the way, the truth and the life** (John 14:6)

Thomas was also plagued by doubt. Even on hearing the good news of the Resurrection, he could not believe it. Jesus had foretold His resurrection, and ten of the disciples had confirmed it with **We have seen the Lord** (John 20:25), Thomas

insists, **Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe** (John 20:26). He felt it was too good to be true.

Thomas was a gloomy pessimist, always looking on the black side. How honest the Bible writers are. He was plagued by doubt, but very honest. He was not a superficial believer, his was not blind faith. He could not believe his fellow disciples, and perhaps he was a bit jealous because he had missed out on an experience of such joy and wonder. He wanted to believe, but held back by commonsense and fear of disillusionment. He would not surrender till he felt certainty.

The problem in his temperament was that his thoughtfulness and cautiousness made him lacking in self-confidence, pessimistic, despondent and melancholy. He made things worse for himself. We do not know why he was missing when Jesus first appeared to the disciples – maybe he was just held up, maybe he was about his business, but maybe he was so broken hearted by the crucifixion that he wanted to be alone with his grief. Whatever the reason, by being absent from the others, he had made things worse for himself. Through being absent he had lost that first sighting of their risen master, and His benediction of peace, and the joy that all the others had felt. As a result his misery was prolonged for another week.

To neglect meetings of Christian fellowship, carelessly or willingly, means we miss out on many blessings enjoyed only in fellowship. People's excuses for neglecting meetings of the fellowship include their unworthiness, their doubts, their not wanting to be hypocritical, their various trials and tribulations. But really it is folly to miss the gatherings of the church – this is the very place where those problems may be dealt with. To neglect the Word, the Table, meeting for praise and prayer – the very meetings where doubts are solved, forgiveness deepened, guidance in trouble can be found, hearts cheered and stabilized. Spiritual health depends on little, regular, habitual helps, and we suffer if we miss out on our medicine. **Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is** (Hebrews 10:25). **Whosoever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them** (Matthew 18:20).

The Lord's dealings with Thomas

It is remarkable that the Lord dealt so graciously. Hard to think of anything more provoking and tiresome than the conduct of Thomas. Some might have wanted to give him a good shaking, but the Lord is so patient and compassionate. He does not reject him or dismiss or blame him. Jesus knows Thomas's problems of temperament and weakness of character. **Peace be unto you** is how Jesus greets him, not with faultfinding or a rebuke. Jesus deals with him according to his weakness. He invites Thomas to put his finger into His hands, and his hand into His side. If nothing less than that would satisfy him, then He gave the necessary evidence.

How patient the Lord is and how he bears with our infirmities. Many are weak children in the family, dull pupils in the school, raw recruits in the army, lame sheep in the flock. Yet He bears with all and does not cast any away. **He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust** (Psalm 103:14).

What an example to us. We grow impatient because we forget the problems some people have. Conversion does not change a person's IQ, bank balance or basic temperament. It is useless to say, "Snap out of it" or "pull yourself together". When a person becomes a Christian, he still has the same temperament and natural disposition. The gospel gradually corrects and helps, sanctifies and consecrates. This needs to be taken into consideration, and we must not to be so quick to condemn and be impatient. Cannot attribute temperament to spiritual causes any more than we can attribute disease to them. Many Christians are dull and slow, but for all that, like Thomas, they are real and true believers.

Thomas quickly responded to Christ's omniscience, love and condescension, and says, **My Lord and my God** (John 20:28). He is the first of the disciples to confess Christ as God. He was the most doubtful, but now he is perfectly satisfied and demonstrates the most faith. Now he not only believes Jesus is alive, but in adoration and submission, love and devotion, he makes this overwhelming confession of his faith. His surrender is complete.

Christ accepts Thomas's worship as His due. He does not attempt to discourage Thomas or deny his worship. Although he was the furthest in doubt, in one single bound he sees into the secret of Christ's person. That Christ is not only a good man, not only risen, but also truly God.

Basic truth – **He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him** (Hebrews 7:25). The gospel that started with John 1:1 now reaches its climax in John 20:28.

Benediction on future believers without privileges of Thomas

Thomas was very privileged. For forty days Jesus was on earth after His resurrection, and appeared to the disciples, who saw Him with their own eyes. Then the forty days came to an end. It was right that special verification of the resurrection be given, as the special granting of miracles at the beginning. But this is not the pattern for the later period. Hence Jesus' words **Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed** (John 20:29).

On Christ's return to glory, a new era begun when men had to walk by faith and not by sight. Christ says those are specially blessed who respond in this way. Not blind faith – for they have the apostolic records, not least the story of Thomas's belief after doubt. We also have a mass of evidence and reasons - transformed disciples, no body produced, origin of church, first day of week established, several witnesses, many dying rather than give up their faith, failure of other explanations, people transformed nowadays from all races, intelligence, social status and moral attainments, finding in the risen living Christ their solution. Transformed lives are testimony to this.

Above all, we have the witness of the Holy Spirit. He takes the things of Christ and reveals them to us. But no actual sight. Faith now comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. **Whom having not seen, ye love: in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory** (1 Peter 1:8).

This is God's norm for us now. Blessed are we who have not seen and yet believe. First hand experience of Christ by faith now, and not by sight (as with Thomas). Bishop Westcott said, "This is the last and greatest of the beatitudes, and is the peculiar heritage of the later church." (i.e. not the apostles).

Conclusion

Do we share in this blessing? Believe not only because of the word of others, but also because of our own experience of Christ as risen and living? You may join in worshipping Him as "Lord and God", but can you say "My" – is He your personal possession?

In the long run, personal faith and experience gives meaning to Easter. Not just a story or a doctrine. But a living relationship with a living person. Not hear about Him, or know others who know Him, but know Him for ourselves.