

The Risen Jesus Appears to Thomas

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 April 2011

Preacher: Alex Cowie

[0 : 00] Well now let's turn back to John's Gospel and chapter 20, John chapter 20, and we'll fix our thoughts around the verses 24 to 29.

Let's read again, now Thomas called the twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, we have seen the Lord.

So he said to them, unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

I want us to think then about the risen Jesus appears to Thomas. And what we want to just remind ourselves of is pretty much what is common knowledge to those who know anything about Thomas the Apostle, and that is he's talked about as the doubter, he's talked about as the sceptic.

And there are people who have quite a fair amount of Bible knowledge who will say to you if you put pressure on them, why aren't you attending church, why don't you sit under the ministry of the word?

[1 : 45] They'll say, oh well, you know, I feel I'm a bit of a doubting Thomas. And that's the kind of, that's the excuse they have, you know. So, you know, well, you know, he doubted, he had his problems, he was a sceptical fellow.

I think I'm in his camp. And they almost, they almost take Thomas' doubt and his scepticism as a badge of honour.

And they think they're entitled to be doubters. And that is the excuse they use to absent themselves from a place of worship or the ministry of the word.

And that is the excuse they use to be a disciple, wasn't he? And I'm like him. I have my doubts about the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

But I would submit to you that that whole way of thinking about Thomas really fails to notice the real Thomas. fails to notice what was really going on in Thomas the Apostle.

[2 : 53] And I hope that in this study tonight we can see that the evidence of the Gospel record shows us quite a different Thomas. And it shows us how the Saviour handled Thomas with his own particular difficulties.

Now, we know from the four Gospels, the record there, that the disciples themselves and the women folk, the men and the women, had serious doubts about the bodily resurrection of Jesus. We were looking earlier today at Mary Magdalene. And we were looking at how when she reported her story to Peter and John, the story that was hers, but it was also the story of the other women, of Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, of Joanna and Salome.

They all had the same story. But the disciples thought they were talking rubbish, idle tales.

They did not believe the report. And that is important in our thinking on Thomas, you see. They had their own problems with the bodily resurrection.

[4 : 25] They weren't expecting the bodily resurrection. It's true, of course, that Thomas, on the face of it, seemed just like them.

But he was, in fact, quite different. The problem with Thomas was deeper and more serious. But I submit to you, it was the problem of a believing soul, of a real follower of Jesus.

What then happened when he wouldn't believe the testimony of the others? What had gone wrong in his experience?

And what lessons can we learn for ourselves? These are some of the questions I hope will be answered as we study this together. The first thing I want us to think about is Thomas' take on Christ's resurrection.

And in considering Thomas' take on Christ's resurrection, I want to begin with looking at Thomas himself, before we get down to his take.

[5 : 39] But in a word, Thomas couldn't accept that Jesus rose from the dead. The first thing I want to say about Thomas himself, before we move into this, is that Thomas was a true disciple.

He was a follower of Jesus, just like the others. There was only one son of perdition. There was only one disciple, who was trained up like the rest, who had been appointed from times eternal to destruction.

Thomas was a true follower. He was trained in the same school as the others. But let me say again, like the others, he failed to grasp the teaching of Jesus that Messiah must suffer and die and rise again.

Jesus laid that down line upon line. And in this, he was no different than the others. He failed to grasp that Messiah must suffer and must die and must rise again.

And he shared the same view as the others too, that the death of Jesus felt the end of Jesus' life and ministry. until the resurrection at the last day.

[7 : 15] You only need to look at your classic passage on this subject. Luke 24 and from verse 13, and the two disciples going down the road to Emmaus, that beautiful passage.

they give you in summary what they all thought. We thought that he would redeem Jesus.

And the ellipsis is we were wrong. they were talking about hopes, and in that you see, the disciples, all of them, including Thomas, thought the same thing.

In that passage I've just referred to, Luke 24, 13, following, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, and was bold to challenge their spiritual dullness, their willful ignorance of the scriptures they had been taught about Messiah.

And so what I'm saying here to begin with is Thomas is a true follower. Thomas was little different than the rest in thinking that the death of Jesus on the cross was the end of the story until the great day.

[8 : 40] But I agree with any who think it. Thomas was worse than the others in that he had gotten himself into a position where he refused to be with his brethren in that room on that evening of the first day when Jesus appeared there.

He refused to be there. There's no excuse. There's no other argument for it. He simply would not be with the others in that room. Whether he was away in a strop and wouldn't be party to anything, we don't know exactly.

But we do know exactly this, that he was struggling in his experience with what the Lord, with what happened to the Lord.

And the truth is he missed the blessing of hearing and seeing that is in Jesus. But that doesn't make a case for him not being a true follower.

That's the point. The second thing we might consider is that Thomas was devastated by the death of Jesus.

[10 : 02] Well, I know I've anticipated that a little bit. Let's look at it more closely. The shock of what happened to Jesus seems to have really impacted Thomas more than the others.

It really got to him most deeply. And we see this by the way he responded to the combined testimony of the others who had seen the risen Jesus.

You see, Thomas doesn't say simply, I'll believe it when I see it. Look at the words. His position is far more resistant.

Thomas states, in a sense, he really states, he demands that the Lord prove himself to be alive by specific tests.

I will definitely not believe unless I see and examine for myself the wounds. He is a turn of mind that wants, it's almost like a sceptical scientist maybe, but he wants to examine the evidence for himself.

[11 : 26] He wants to really say, I'm satisfied now. But you see, he's setting the test. Now, this is not a case of blatant unbelief.

It's not the unbelief of a sceptic, although I almost said it there. here is a true believer and an apostle at that who has been plunged into the dark night of faith.

We were reading that in Isaiah chapter 50. Who among you fears the Lord? That's a believer. Who obeys the voice of his servant?

Who obeys Jesus? That's a believer. Then, in the same breath, who walks in darkness and has no light? A believer in the experience that is likened into darkness, he has no light on the subject.

That's where Thomas was. He was in the dark night of faith, unable to comprehend what God had done in Providence.

[12:36] Well, come on. This is something we all know about. This is something we should immediately find ourselves connecting with Thomas in the passage.

We know about this. How often we have been unable to comprehend what God has done to us personally or to others near and dear to us.

And so a week had passed since the reported appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ to the disciples. Thomas was still in this totally dark experience in his soul.

In his inmost thoughts, he was in a devastated state of soul. So much so that he appeared on the surface like an unbeliever.

man. Now, there are some interpreters who make a great emphasis on him being obstinate, being extremely difficult in his mental posture, unwilling to consider, and he was hard hearted.

[14:02] I think the self-ass overstating the position. The man was in turmoil. The man was in turmoil because all that he had thought would happen with Jesus didn't happen at all.

Don't forget these disciples were taught from their childhood in the synagogue school. And they were taught the rabbinical view of the day.

That is that Messiah was coming soon, and that Messiah would establish his earthly kingdom, and that the nations would recognize the people of Israel as the people of God, and they would come flocking to Jerusalem, and listen to the word of God from them.

They were brought up to these things. And these things affected them even although Jesus had taught them so many different things.

Witness for a moment. in the book of Acts, another post-translection appearance before Jesus left them, a question was asked, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

[15:22] You see what I'm saying? That was ingrained in their psyche. They had been taught and taught and taught. And they thought that way still. So what I'm saying here is, let's cut Thomas a wee bit of slack in our thinking.

Let's try and identify with his struggle. Things didn't turn out the way he thought they would.

And he couldn't accept the way God did it. So he became very low in his spirit and darkened in his understanding and his faith was reduced to the flickering smouldering wick that only a real sight of Jesus would fix.

God is so different. Don't we crave real evidence at times?

This preacher could tell you lots of stories about himself, about his own ministry and the apparent fruitlessness of it from his perspective, but that wouldn't be fair.

[16:49] And how at times, just in the nick of time, sometimes often, God just gives that we answer. We can identify with Thomas if we let ourselves.

My dear friends, the point in all this is that Thomas is a believer. He's a follower and he's struggling. He's a follower in the dark night of faith. He's a follower who has resisted the testimony of his own fellow disciples.

He wants Christ to come to him his way. And I think if we're honest with ourselves, there are times in our experience when we've been in our own way just where Thomas was on that occasion and in that week of his life.

And we are just like him in a way, and for all I know, you're just like him tonight, waiting for a word from the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't be cast down, don't be afraid, don't be faithless, but be believing.

[18:18] The second thing we want to look at then is that Jesus appears to Thomas. And you have that in verses from verse 26 through to 29.

Once again the disciples are in the same situation that in that room the windows are barred, the doors are bolted.

Same reason fear of the Jewish authorities. And Jesus appears in their midst and he spoke peace to his saints. But let's consider what a wonderful and loving and gracious way Jesus dealt with Thomas.

He accommodates his erring disciples. He accommodates him. That's not the same as condoning the mental posture of Thomas.

He's not condoning what Thomas did. He's not saying, oh, he did the right thing Thomas for you. no, no, no, no. He's accommodating the weakness of his servant.

[19:39] And that should touch our own hearts. He accommodates him. And he responds, in this case, to the demands of his erring disciples.

Point by point. But he does it in a very loving way. He says to him, Thomas, he commands him, verse 27, reach your finger here, that's a command, and look at my hands, examine for yourself then, that's what you wanted, and reach your hand here, and put it in my side. He bows down in wonderful, loving condescension, and he lets Thomas have what Thomas wants. And don't, he says, be any longer and believing, but be believing. You see, in the dark night of faith, that's what we're like. It's like we're not believing. That's the way we are. We're all over the place. And you see, for Thomas, this was a momentous experience. I don't think we're wrong to suggest that he was named and shamed, Thomas. And he was shamed.

[21 : 10] Do what you want to do. Here's your chance. Don't be unbelieving. What a humbling experience. What a convicting experience to hear the voice of his beloved Redeemer coming powerfully and yet sweetly to him.

The old men used to pray, Oh, Lord, come over the mountains of our provocations, meaning our sins, the barrier of our sins have made.

Many is the time we heard them and loved to hear them. Lord, come over the mountains of our provocations. And that's exactly what the Lord Jesus said to Thomas.

he sweetly spoke and powerfully spoke to his servant over the mountains of his sinful provocation. And we may say doubtless, the words and the sight of Jesus brought light and joy to Thomas. But I suspect most strongly from his response, his heart was melted and his unbelief was turned to worshipping adoration and vibrant faith.

[22 : 36] This appearance, this literal appearance of the risen Lord to Thomas was a glorious self-disclosure that had a tremendous impact on that disciple and brought life and joy and peace to him.

Don't be unbelieving, but be believing. And Thomas' response tells us that what I've just been saying to you is through my Lord and my God.

It is my Lord and my God. Some have suggested that all he was uttering was tantamount to blasphemy.

Oh Lord, oh God, no, may it not be so. No, no, here is the affirmation of faith. My Lord and my God. And there is no need to scrutinize the evidence the way I wanted to. All is well. Jesus is alive and he is me.

[23 : 56] And the Savior commands him to keep on believing and he commends him for believing.

and then with a sudden turn, with a masterly turn, as only the master could do, he blesses those here tonight and in every generation who have not seen and yet who believe.

They are more blessed than you, Thomas, because you have seen, you believe. But blessed are those who have not seen and yet who have believed.

And there is a wonderful encouragement in that to ourselves, you see. Let us therefore listen to the voice of eternal life speaking into our hearts.

and let us hear to the spirit and the word saying to us here tonight, blessed are you who have not seen and yet who have believed.

[25 : 17] Let's be settled that it is not weak-mindedness, it is not foolishness, it is not unscientific to believe that he not only died, but that he rose again.

Let us be content with the truth as it is in him, and affirm it. I was saying in the morning that a few years back we were out in Cyprus and I remember the tour guide saying that it was around Easter time, the tour guide said that in their churches, in the Greek-speaking churches on Easter Sunday, they all greet each other with the words he is risen.

There's something really sweet and appropriate about that. He is risen. We're affirming our conviction and we're expressing the truth.

He is risen. But you see, let's pull this together now as we conclude, because we wanted to learn and we said at the beginning, wanted to learn from Thomas' experience.

Thomas was walking in the dark night of faith. It was a difficult path for him, it was unpleasant, he was distant from his brethren, he was out there on the wings, and he wouldn't be with them, and then eventually, happily, for him, they managed to get him into that room, and Jesus came.

[27 : 04] And Jesus turned his darkness into light, and his sadness into gladness. And you see, it's the same for us. Wherever we are in our experience, and we're in this darkness, this uncertainty, we don't know where we are.

Life has had such twists and turns, and in the very depth of our heart, we are much like Thomas. Let us hear him say, do not be unbelieved, but be believed.

And let's remember that he retains those marks of his sacrificial slaughter in him today, for us, not for him, so that we can remember he was pierced for us, in order that we might have life in all its fullness.

Blessed are you who have not seen, but who believe. Blessed are you who can say by faith, of Jesus the risen one, my Lord and my God.

Someone said, Jesus, these eyes have never seen, that radiant form of life. The veil of sense hangs dark between thy blessed face and mine.

[28 : 46] Yet, though I have not seen, and still by faith must rest alone. I love thee, dearest Lord, and seen, but not and known.

I love these words. I love thee, dearest Lord, and seen, but not and may not be our testimony tonight.

My Lord and my God. Amen. were wir