

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: 19 February 2010

Preacher: Rev Duncan Macleod

[0 : 00] Seeking God's help, we're going to look this evening at the passages that we've already read together, because I think that sometimes it's beneficial for us to look at some of those characters of whom mention is made in God's Word as we look at our own Christian lives.

These characters, with the exception of Jesus himself, are brought before us, as Cromwell once famously put it, warts and all.

And the fact that they're depicted for us in their true light is, I believe, in order to remind us that they were all men and women who by the grace of God were what they were.

And they were men and women in whose lives God's grace was demonstrated. Tonight we're going to look at one of the twelve whom Jesus called to follow him during his days of ministry on earth.

We know that the twelve were a very mixed group of men with their own different strengths and weaknesses. Looking at the twelve, we're reminded of the variety that there was within that group, a variety that ought to be reflected surely at all times among God's people.

[1 : 35] We're not all the same, but we have the same Saviour. Thomas, of course, has had a very bad press over the years, so much so that the phrase or the description, doubting Thomas, is one with which all of us here tonight will be very familiar.

And yet, although there was a day in Thomas' life where he certainly doubted, and probably more than one such day in his life, there were many other facets to Thomas' character that I believe we would do well to learn from for our own Christian lives.

Perhaps we can identify with Thomas in relation to his doubts, but Thomas was also someone who was very devoted to his Lord.

He was someone who was so dedicated to following his Lord, that one day he declared that he was prepared even to go and die with his Saviour.

So this evening, as we examine ourselves before the Lord's Supper, I think that there may be much in what the Bible presents us with in relation to this man that we might benefit from looking at together.

[3 : 03] The first point that I want to highlight tonight is taken from the account that we read in John chapter 11. And in that passage, Thomas is clearly coming across as a man of great courage.

He was very courageous in following his Saviour. These were dangerous times. The Jews had taken up stones and they had attempted to put Jesus to death.

They had tried to arrest him, but he had escaped from their hands. And he's gone across the Jordan and he stayed there for a while.

Over there, many come to him and many put their faith in him. But these are dangerous days. And then news comes to Jesus that his friend Lazarus is unwell and that before you know where you are, his friend Lazarus is dead.

Jesus, as he hears this news, wants to go, not straight away, of course, but he eventually wants to go to where Lazarus has died in order that he might perform a wonderful work.

[4 : 37] When he says to the disciples, let's go, initially they're afraid. they're afraid to go. Jesus tells them that Lazarus has died and Jesus says, let's go to him.

And it is Thomas who responds positively to these words. And it is Thomas who says, let us also go that we may die with him.

The rest of the disciples were afraid. But Thomas issues this rallying call and in so doing, he demonstrates that he is courageous by God's grace enough, if necessary, to die with Jesus.

He is the one who stirs the rest of the disciples. He is the one who rallies them. He is the one who encourages them.

He is the one who is prepared to go and give the lead. He is prepared to stand up for Jesus even though he knows full well that that might cost him his life.

[6 : 03] When Jesus has said earlier, let's go to Judea again, the disciples have said, the Jews were trying to stone you. Are you going there again?

That was the way the disciples responded. But Thomas says, let's go that we may die with him. He is prepared if necessary to go the whole way and even to the point of death in identifying himself with Jesus.

The question for us here tonight is simply this. How prepared are we to identify ourselves with Jesus whatever that may cost us?

Thomas knew that it could cost him and that it could cost the rest of the disciples their lives. But that doesn't prevent him from expressing himself in these words.

It's unlikely at least as things done tonight that identifying ourselves with Jesus this weekend will cost us our lives at least at this present time.

[7 : 23] The Lord alone knows what may be ahead of us in days to come. But we have been asked tonight whether or not we like Thomas are prepared to go with Jesus whatever that may mean for us in terms of cost.

Are we prepared tonight to go all the way with him who went all the way for us? That's one of the challenges that face us this weekend.

Are we going to be fearful and timid? Are we going to hold back from acknowledging the Lord? From confessing Christ?

Or are we going to follow Thomas' example and go with him? Nail our colors to the mast.

It seems so easy for us to point the finger at Thomas on account of some of the events that followed on from this.

[8 : 37] But at this point and this is where we're really I suppose introduced to Thomas other than that he's mentioned earlier among the twelve. We would do well to learn from this first introduction and ask do we have the courage?

Do we have what it takes? Cost us what it will to confess him before the world?

To go with him even as Thomas was prepared to go with him. The second incident where Thomas is brought before us is a very interesting one and one that again I believe has much to teach us. It's in John 14 and there Thomas receives light from Jesus receives clarity from Jesus as to what the Christian life is all about.

In John chapter 14 Jesus speaks of heaven and Jesus speaks of himself as the way to heaven.

[10 : 01] When Jesus speaks of heaven he says to his disciples you know the way where I am going to. And it's Thomas who says Lord we do not know where you're going how can we know the way.

Thomas is prepared to ask questions of Jesus what do you mean Lord? You see Thomas has a teachable spirit.

Thomas having followed his Lord wants to learn from his Lord and isn't afraid of asking the Lord the questions that he needs to know the answer to in order that he might live to his honour and praise and glory.

And as Thomas asks these questions of Jesus answers the questions and gives them greater clarity in relation to what his salvation is all about.

And surely that is what we want too. As we follow Jesus we identify ourselves with Thomas in that there are so many questions that we don't know the answer to.

[11 : 35] But the question for us tonight is this are we prepared to go to him and to learn of him to be taught by him are we making use of these means of grace that are available to us in order that we might receive more light from our Lord in order that he might shed light for us more and more on what our salvation is all about.

Thomas asks Jesus to clarify some very crucial truths and Jesus does that and Thomas realizes as Jesus answers his questions that without Jesus as the way there is no going and without Jesus as the truth there is no knowing and without Jesus as the life there is no living Jesus teaches them what might seem to us to be basic truths and yet these were truths that he needed to grasp and that he was willing to be taught in order that he might glorify and enjoy his saviour and the salvation that had been conferred upon him as you listen to what Thomas asks him perhaps you think that he was astonishingly ignorant but at least he was prepared to go in his ignorance to the one whom he knew

to be the greatest teacher of all perhaps we are here tonight without questions even as those who are following the

Lord and perhaps we think that there are some difficulties that we have that are so basic that we dare not express these to others we can follow Thomas example and go with them to Jesus so that tonight if there is anything holding us back from going all the way with Jesus from obeying the truth as he does in Jesus and from knowing more of what's involved in that abundant life that Jesus came to give us then let's go to him let's ask him to shed his light into our darkened minds and hearts even as his people the Lord doesn't want to leave his people groping in the dark as far as spiritual truths are concerned and this evening as Thomas goes to Jesus and receives great clarity from

Jesus in connection with the way the truth and the life so we by God's grace can do the same in order that we in our lives as those who are taught of God may know what God requires of us and by his grace be able to do his will what does the Lord want of us this weekend go to his word and the answer couldn't be clear he wants all his people to do this in remembrance of him but then the third scenario that scripture presents us with in relation to this man is one where we find him confused in relation to basic truths and demanding concrete evidence before he's prepared to believe and of course that is in

John chapter 20 we don't know where Thomas was on that occasion when the rest of them were gathered together one can only speculate as to the reasons why he wasn't there but what we do know is that he wasn't there and we know that he missed out on so much that night by not being present when Jesus came for all that Thomas had been enlightened for all that Thomas had gone on with the Lord on this occasion he is posted missing and when he hears from the rest of how Jesus has appeared to them he refuses point blank to believe he wants more evidence and he missed out on the evidence that they have had simply by not being there now it may be that it wasn't all together that he was rejecting what they were telling him it may be that he wanted to believe it and word has already come of course from from others that the

[17:29] Lord has risen from the dead Mary Magdalene has told the eleven that the Lord has risen from the dead but he's not there that night and so because he's not there he not only misses out but he demands more evidence before he will fully accept or perhaps even accept it at all that Jesus is risen we miss out on so much that we might otherwise have when we are not found in fellowship with the people of God now there may be many times when it's not possible for us to be found among God's people and God will make that up to us God is able to meet with us where we are if so be that our reasons for not being present with

God's people are legitimate reasons but when we're not there when we could be then we're running the risk of missing out on what God gives to those who are gathered in his name after all in words that we quote so frequently our Lord has promised that where two or three are gathered in his name that he is in the midst well on this occasion as they are gathered together on that evening of the first day of the week they are terrified the doors are locked they're afraid of the Jews it's very unlikely that they expected the Lord to come but come he did and when he came they were glad and they heard

Jesus speak words of peace to them and he breathed on them and said to them receive the Holy Spirit Thomas missed out on all that by not being there and it was as a result of that that he doubted when they spoke and when they told him that they had seen the Lord this same Thomas who's been so courageous this same Thomas who's received such clarity from Jesus is now confused so confused that he not only can't accept what they're saying but goes on to demand concrete evidence before he's prepared to believe unless he says

I see in his hands the mark of the nails unless I place my finger into the mark of the nails unless I place my hand into his side I will never believe we may say tonight that we're not of the same mind as Thomas in relation to this and yet we may be here tonight and what we're looking for before we prepare to take a step further along the Christian road is aside that that it is the spirit of unbelief that asks for a sign and that no sign will be given to that generation except the sign of the prophet Jonah and he is pointing there to his own death and resurrection what more do you want what more do you need than you already have in me maybe you're here and you're in Thomas shoes you're wanting more you're demanding something concrete and you're failing to realize that you already have it in Christ's death and resurrection that's what we're remembering the Lord's death till he come we're here because of the gospel and the gospel is put in a nutshell this that Christ died for

our sins according to the scriptures and rose again the third day according to the scriptures what more than that do we need what more than that are you looking for don't be like Thomas don't be confused in relation to these things your salvation does not depend on an experience you have your salvation depends on what

[23 : 42] Christ has done in your Roman place and as you've been brought to the point where you've accepted by God's grace what he has done for you you don't need to look for more than you already have in Jesus more more is not required or even desired or at least it ought not to be unless could not satisfy so are you tonight confused as Thomas was are you tonight looking for concrete evidence as Thomas was where did Thomas get that concrete evidence that he was looking for he got it in Jesus and in Jesus alone and it's interesting that it was eight days later when his disciples were inside again but this time Thomas was with them and there although the doors were locked Jesus came again and he stood among them and he said peace be with you and then he said to Thomas put your finger here and see my hands and put out your hand and place it in my side do not disbelieve but believe and scripture is silent as to whether Thomas ever did what is Lord asked of scriptures and where scripture is silent let's not speculate we have enough to reflect on in what's revealed spending days and nights reflecting on what's not revealed so what's not revealed is not necessary for us to know but what scripture does tell us is this that seeing Jesus and hearing Jesus Thomas made a great confession Thomas answered my Lord and my God my Lord and my God as far as I'm aware Thomas is the only person in the whole of the New Testament who actually calls Jesus my God in this way yes there are many references to our personal relationship with Jesus in terms of being our Lord my Lord but Thomas goes on to say more than my Lord he says my Lord and my God now it was a very short testimony it didn't amount to much in terms of words but it amounted to everything in terms of glorifying and honouring his Lord as his God this is Thomas great confession and this is the confession that God is requiring of us tonight what is it that God wants us this weekend to confess it's that Jesus is Lord and that he is old God that he is ours our confession focuses on who he is and on his relationship with us what is it that will be asked of you if you come this evening and present yourself for the Lord's table you'll be asked to what Jesus means to you who Jesus is it will all be about him whatever our experiences may or may not have been of Jesus and Thomas had his ups and downs in terms of experience all that matters is this confession that he made no man calls Jesus Lord but by the spirit of God and just as Thomas made this confession so we are required in our day to make the same confession Thomas is singled out here by Jesus when he comes and stands among them because Jesus knows full well where Thomas has been and look where Thomas is at in terms of his confusion Jesus isn't here initially rebuking him Jesus is here initially encouraging him peace be with you then he said to Thomas not where were you last week he doesn't haul him over the coals for where he's been he simply says to him put your finger here and see my hands and then

[29 : 03] Thomas makes this confession and then Jesus says have you believed because you've seen me blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed maybe you're here tonight and you're saying well it was easy for Thomas to confess him because after all he saw him whether or not he did what he was asked to do in terms of his hands he saw him and maybe if only I could see him if only if only I had that kind of miraculous encounter with him then I'd have no problem in confessing Jesus says that those who have not seen and yet have believed are those who are truly blessed we walk by faith not by sight so this evening if we believe in

Jesus then we're blessed and we're saved if our trust for eternity is solely in what Christ has done for us we're blessed Jesus says so even though we've not seen him as Thomas saw even though we've not heard him in the sense Thomas heard him we've seen him spiritually and we've heard his voice he has opened our eyes in relation to him and he spoken to us through his word and called us to himself and here Thomas in confessing the Lord at the same time receives a great word of confirmation from his Lord in relation to these great truths he says to him he has believed because he seen him and those who have not seen and yet have believed are blessed what a word of confirmation that must have been to this servant of

Christ at the end of the day it's not what man says to us that will confirm spiritual realities to us but what he says Thomas wouldn't have received the confirmation that he was looking for if he only heard these words coming from his fellow disciples but he heard them coming from his saviour and they were all the confirmation that he needed and if we come here tonight wanting to hear our Lord

speaking to us then we'll not go away disappointed if we only come to listen to what man has to say we'll hear nothing that will be of any good to us but if we've come say I'll hear what God the Lord will speak then as happens here with Thomas and indeed the rest so it will be with us too he will speak peace to his people there's one other thing about

Thomas that I want to highlight as we finish tonight and that is that following on from this we find Thomas forevermore Thomas in the company in the company of God's people up until this point of course we've seen how Thomas was not always there with them and of how he missed out on account of that but the last two glimpses that we have of Thomas in the Bible we find him with the rest of the disciples in John 21 down there by the sea of Tiberias Jesus reveals himself again to them and Thomas is there they were going to go out fishing and of course they'd gone out and caught nothing and then

Jesus comes and you know the story you don't need me to enlarge or elaborate on it tonight that passage is one that often focuses on John on Simon Peter sorry and what Jesus says to him in terms of do you love me and there's a sermon there in itself but the point I'm trying to make tonight is that Thomas was there Thomas wasn't missing anymore when Jesus came Thomas was there in the company with the rest and what a wonderful miracle he experienced in the company of the rest as they dragged in the net full of fish 153 large fish there and what a wonderful breakfast they had there on the shore together in the company of their Lord a fellowship meal indeed in their

[34 : 40] Lord's company and then in Acts after the Lord has gone ascended to heaven where's Thomas to be found Thomas was found in the upper room as we saw in our reading he's there enjoying the fellowship the communion of the people of God and surely oh surely oh surely that's what we want to be in fellowship with his people in the company of those whose God is the Lord not only receiving great blessings as Thomas did that day down by the sea but also as Thomas was there in the upper room waiting for the fulfilment of the promised Holy Spirit who was to come and as a result of whose ministry these disciples

Thomas included were to turn the world upside down are we here tonight and will we be found as those whose confession is that Jesus is our Lord and our God in the company of those who not only have already experienced miracles of grace in our lives but who anticipate more from the one who's able to do first immeasurably more than we can ask for our even thing that's what he did for Thomas and for the rest of those who were there and as we honour him that's what he'll do for us too because the eye has not seen nor the ear heard neither has it entered the heart of man but God has prepared for those who love him Thomas for all his faults was by grace a man of faith and the Lord did great things for him and through him and whose Lord and his God is our Lord and our God and I trust that we too will be found among the company as he was for as long as the Lord leaves his heel and then be found at last among the company who are in that room that is higher than the other room in the house full of houses that he has gone to prepare for his own prepared people may God by his grace help us to at least have learned something from this little look at Thomas' life tonight to take with us into our own lives as we seek day by day to glorify and to enjoy him let's pray Lord we give thanks we give thanks for that grace that worked in Thomas' life and that works in the lives of all those who are your people and we pray tonight

Lord that whatever difficulties we may have that we might not be disobedient to what you require of us help us Lord to be devoted to you and to declare unashamedly whose we are and whom we serve that you might receive all glory and all honour and all praise world without end Amen