

Thomas - The Devoted Doubting Disciple

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to John chapter 11, John chapter 11 and verse 16.

So Thomas called the twin, said to his fellow disciples, let us also go that we may die with him.

We have been looking at different Bible characters and today we are looking at Thomas. And if we were to give a title to this we would term it Thomas the Devoted Doubting Disciple.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is one of the most comforting parts of God's word. It's an incredible encouragement to the Christian because we see in there that whole story which we are very, very familiar with.

We see so much of God's purposes at work, the way God works, which is so different to the way that we work or expect that he would work.

[1 : 21] But we also in that episode of the raising of Lazarus we see the great proof of the statement that Jesus makes where he says, I am the resurrection and the life.

And it's quite extraordinary how people blank statements of Jesus like that out from their lives. Because there's nobody else in the whole wide world has ever come into this world and made a statement equal or comparable to that statement.

Saying, I am the resurrection and the life. I raise from the dead. I give life. And yet, the vast majority in our own country aren't interested in Jesus.

And just readily dismissed. Which is, it just shows the absolute blindness of sin. Now as we know the death of Lazarus is a very sore episode for Mary and Martha for quite a while.

And death is always a painful thing. And death of course is, as we know, is the result of sin. God had said to Adam at the very beginning, if you eat of the fruit of that tree, you will die.

[2 : 38] And from that day of disobedience down, death has reigned. Death is falling upon us. Our loved ones have died.

And we also will die. It's the inescapable truth fact of life. That unless the Lord Jesus Christ comes first, we will die.

And death of course is that which reminds us that the death that isn't just physical. It isn't just the separation of loved ones from us.

It shows us also something at a deeper level. That death affects right into the very depth of our being. There's a spiritual aspect to life as well.

And you see, death is at different levels. There's physical death. And there's also spiritual death. Now to have spiritual death is to be separate from God's love.

[3 : 42] It's to be separate from Christ Jesus. That's spiritual death. Where a person doesn't have the life of Jesus within them. If you were to ask the majority of people, what do you want out of life?

I think the majority of people would say, well, I would like to live life to the full. And we would all say, absolutely, I agree with that. That's what I want to do. That's what everybody wants to do.

But the Lord Jesus would say to us, you know, you can't live life to the full without me. And that's why Jesus said, I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly.

That's why Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. So that although we live life and live out our days in this world, unless we have Jesus Christ, we don't have the fullness of life.

We don't have that life that is in him, which brings a new dimension to life, where we see things differently. We have a goal in life.

[4 : 52] We have a purpose in life. Because so often, as people get older, and maybe as they begin to analyze life, life can become quite empty.

And as a person gets older and they look into the future, what is the future? Because most of life has gone behind. What is, but for the Christian, they're saying, well, I know where I'm going.

I know why I'm here. And I know that there's so much still to come. And there's almost an excitement, an anticipation within their heart about what's ahead.

And that's why Jesus says, it's in me that you have life and that you have it more abundantly. And so Jesus in this very episode is proving the fact that he is life.

Because he brings back from the dead to life, which is absolutely extraordinary. Now we find that Jesus receives the news that Lazarus is really ill.

[5 : 56] And of course we know that this was a home that he absolutely loved. He loved his family. Tells us that, that he loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus. It was a special home. It was a home he often went to.

And our expectation would be whenever we would find that the sisters, Mary and Martha, send for Jesus, they send word for Jesus, you'd expect Jesus to say, well, I must go there.

He would say to the disciples, I've got to go right away. But he doesn't. He delays. He stays. He stays put. And that seems really strange.

And he waited, in fact, until Lazarus died. And to our understanding, you know, that seems, it seems harsh. It seems hard.

The home that he loves, he allows to be, have the tears flowing. But the great thing of this particular incident is that it pulls back the shutters, pulls back the screens so that we see another level.

[7 : 01] And Jesus is telling them, I've allowed this delay on my part. Because Jesus could have gone there and healed Lazarus, but he chose not to.

And Jesus is showing that he remained where he was because he had a bigger picture to work for. And through that delay, faith was going to be strengthened.

The glory of God was going to be discovered. And many people were going to come to faith through the raising of Lazarus. We're told all that within the chapter.

And so we've always got to remember that when things don't work out the way we expect, and often when pains and trials and sorrows and sadness comes into our life, and nothing makes sense, and we're saying, Lord, what are you doing?

That the Lord, if we could hear him speak, would say, I know what I'm doing. I have a purpose, and I have a plan. And maybe it's almost as if the Lord is saying, I'm sorry for the pain that you're maybe having to go through just now, but I have a purpose, and one day you'll see it.

- [8 : 19] And it's going to be glorious. Maybe just now you can't. Maybe even in this lifetime you won't see it. But rest assured you will see it.
- For the Lord's purposes will be unfolded, and his glory will be displayed. Now, when Jesus says to the disciples that he was going back up into Judea, the alarm bells went off.
- Because straight away they thought, oh, last time you were there, Lord, they were planning to stone you. They were wanting to stone you. This is a risky business. And he shouldn't really be going back.
- That's what they're trying to warn Jesus. And I want us just to look for a little at this man, Thomas. And we see that the disciples are all a very different group, different personalities.
- And that's one of the great things when a person becomes a Christian. We don't become clones of one another. We don't resemble one another. There is still our own individuality, our own personalities, our own characters and traits.
- [9 : 31] But every Christian, while there is still their own individuality, there should be a growing resemblance to Jesus. So that there's this two-fold thing going on. Our own character is still there, the person we are, but there also should be evident a growing resemblance to Jesus.
- But anyway, here's Thomas, this particular disciple. And Thomas is a man who was a pessimist. But he was always, he would be what we would term a very gloomy Christian.
- He always tended to look on the dark side of things. As we used the expression, the bottle was always half empty rather than half full. That's the way Thomas looked at life.
- And that's the way sometimes it is with Christians. Not every Christian, not every Christian would have the enthusiasm and be impetuous like Peter. Not every Christian would have the gentle way of dealing with people like Andrew.
- Some Christians, that's their nature. They're pessimists. They look on the dark side of life. They get down really, really easily.
- [10 : 47] And some other Christians might come up and say, hey, come on, you shouldn't be like that. You're a Christian. You should be singing. You should be full of joy. They can't help it. Yes, they have a joy. Maybe others can't see it.
- But it's there. They love the Lord. And that's one of the things about this disciple, Thomas. He was a man, despite his pessimism, despite the fact that he looked at things through dark glasses, he still really loved the Lord.
- And we find that statement in that, because that's what he's saying in verse 16. Let us go, that we may die with him. Straight away, Thomas has gone to the very worst scenario.
- Oh, they're going to stone him. Ah, well, that's it. We'll go up with him, and that's the end of everything. He'll be stoned, and we'll be stoned. That's the end. We're all going to die together.
- But you see in Thomas here, there's also a great courage and a great loyalty. And this is one of the things, as we look at this man, Thomas.
- [11 : 54] In that statement that he makes, let us also go that we may die with him, we see there that there is a love that is not willing to part with Christ.
- And that's one of the great truths with regard to the Christian. You see, in a normal situation, you would expect Thomas, being the kind of person that he is, kind of fearful person, and he would say, oh, well, I'll tell you one thing, I'm not going to go up there.
- If Jesus wants to go up there, let him go up. But I'm staying put. Because if I go up, I know what's going to happen. Jesus will die, and so will I. But that's not the way Thomas is looking at it.

He says, oh, yes, we're going to go up, Jesus is going to die, and we're going to die, but I'm going anyway. And that's love. It's that love that refuses to part with Christ.

And you know, that's the love that is in you as well. Because there have been loads of things in your life, as you look back over your Christian life, that you would say, if it was taking you just at a natural point of view, you would have said, that was it.

[13 : 08] Some of the providences that came into your life, that shook you to the very core, some of the temptations that you've faced, some of the things that you've done, and as you look back over your Christian life, you would say, that's it, I throw in the towel, I'm walking away, I've turned my back.

But you can't. Why? Because of this love. It's our love that will not let go. And although it's our love that won't let go on your part, it's our love that won't let go most and more importantly on God's part.

Because God won't let you go. And that's why you're still going on with this powerful love that is there. A love that refuses to let go despite, as we say, your lives often being rattled and shaken.

And as we said already, it's our love that is willing to die for Christ. Because when Thomas would assess the situation, he would say, right, what's it all?

What is it? Who is the most important? Who is most important? What's most important in my life? And as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, he would come to the conclusion, well, Jesus says, I don't want life without Jesus.

[14 : 27] Because Thomas had lived life without Jesus. And he says, I don't want to go back there. I want to live with Jesus. And you know, we might often think, how would we do if we lived as many Christians do today with absolute fear of their lives, where there is persecution rife?

and as you, we so often hear and know and as you heard over just at the, Friday there, though I missed that, just the, some of the most awful things that go on in this world against the Christian.

And sometimes you say to yourself, how would I be if I lived there? Would I, would I stand for Christ? Or would I fail? And at one level it's sometimes very difficult to answer that because we're not in that particular situation.

But we find that the Christians in that situation they stand for Jesus because of that love that is there. A love that is ready to die.

A love that is willing to die. And again with regard to Thomas the other thing we notice here is that the love that was in his heart was not willing to oppose the will of Christ.

[15 : 47] See it would be very easy for Thomas to say Lord you know this is ridiculous going up here. You're putting your life unnecessarily in danger.

You shouldn't do that. And you're putting our lives in danger as well. Thomas doesn't oppose the will of Christ. He submits to it. And that's what love does.

Because sometimes the will of Christ for your life is difficult. And it's very easy. Sometimes there are times and don't get me wrong there are times we have arguments with the Lord. And we do argue with the Lord.

And we say Lord what are you doing? Why? This is not the way. This is not what I expected. This is not but we you know as time goes on grace begins to work.

And you begin to submit and say well Lord I don't know what you're doing. but I'm coming to the conclusion that this is your will for my life. It's not what I would have chosen but it's your will for my life.

[16 : 49] And that's what grace does and that's where Thomas was. Despite his fear and his trepidation and despite his pessimism he is not going to try and change the Lord's will for his life.

And so Thomas comes out although we see him in this way of being a gloomy Christian he also comes through us as very devoted devoted Christian.

We didn't read it but the next time we meet Thomas it's in the upper room in John chapter 14 and Jesus had been just talking about the house of many mansions and such like and he'd spoken to them about going away from them and coming to back for them and Thomas who was obviously very distressed at the thought of Jesus going away.

He says Lord we do not know where you're going and how can we know the way? Now it's a very simple statement that Thomas is making but you know this is the other thing about Thomas he was also slow to grasp things because Jesus had taught them over and over and over again about why he was here what was going to happen where he was going to go and the future so Thomas is showing that he just didn't get it and you know there's lots of the Lord's people like that and we mustn't we know we mustn't be harsh we'll see that in a moment because we're just going to look at the last thing with regard to Thomas it's a gracious way that Jesus dealt with Thomas despite Thomas lack of understanding his slowness to get things his actual real sometimes disbelief or unbelief

Jesus is so gentle in his dealings with Thomas and we've always got to remember that not every Christian is going to grasp things and take hold of things at the same pace just the same as in school if you have a class of 30 people not every person is going to going to grasp everything at the same pace and so it is in the Christian life some people they grow very quickly other people they grow very very very slowly Jesus in fact said that even with regard to a lifetime a lifetime Christian life everybody's not going to be at the same level Jesus said that in the parable of the sower he said you know in the fullness of a person's life some will bear fruit to the glory of God a hundred fold in other words these are Christians and their lives are just going to blossom and blossom and blossom they're going to become outstanding

[19 : 45] Christians and they're going to bear so much fruit to the glory of God but not everybody's going to be like that because Jesus said some will be sixty fold and there's some going to be thirty fold different levels and we must we've got to always remember that the church is not going to have every Christian at the same level same level of understanding the same level of ability same level of gifts same level of fruit bearing same level of Christian witness and even within even within the individual Christian's life there will be times when that life will be bearing a lot of fruit and other times when it won't be bearing so much fruit we see that sometimes just in the natural world with regard to supposing an apple tree one year there might be hardly any apples on it another year it might have a full bloom and so it can be within the Christian life as well one year bearing a lot of fruit another year not so much fruit for differing reasons and then the last time we meet

Thomas here it's what we read and it's in the upper room and this is the incident of course which he is best known for where he gets his name doubting Thomas and that's why I said he's also devoted the disciple because it's unfair just to call him doubting Thomas because I think he's a lovely man a lovely committed devoted Christian although he is so pessimistic and so full of his doubts and this is of course with regard to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and it's quite extraordinary how Thomas really doubts it because Thomas had seen back in chapter 11 when he went up expecting to die with Jesus he had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead and he had heard Jesus say I am the resurrection and the life and yet Thomas had refused to believe the resurrection of Jesus himself now unfortunately for Thomas he missed

Jesus' first meeting with the disciples remember how they were gathered in the upper room and they were in fear of the Jews and there was that moment when Jesus appeared among them peace be to you it must have been one of the you know there will be certain moments in a person's life that will burn deep and you never ever forget it it was just it leave an image that will be there for all your life well that would be so in the disciples experience they're there and their hearts are heavy the Lord whom they followed and they've left everything for has been laid in the grave and there all of a sudden he just appears in front of them and he says peace unto you and it tells us that they were filled with joy little wonder it must have been one of the most amazing moments and they enjoyed this great time of communion and fellowship together but Thomas wasn't there we don't know why and there's a very simple lesson in that as well that often we can miss blessing by not being with a gathering of the Lord's people but anyway

Thomas refused to believe them and verse 25 so the other in chapter 20 so the other disciples told him we've seen the Lord and we find Thomas he gives a list of qualifications which are quite remarkable but he said to them unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails and place my finger into the mark of the nails and place my hand into his side I will never believe and for eight days Thomas remained in that condition then again they were all gathered together Thomas was with them and Jesus appeared in their midst and what I love is it says although the doors were locked Jesus stood among them and said peace be with you and before the disciples had time to say anything or before Jesus said anything else he just straight away said to Thomas Thomas put your finger here remember what

Thomas had said unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails and place my finger into the mark of the nails and Jesus said Thomas put your finger in the mark of the nails and then Jesus said Thomas had said and I need to place my hand at the side you know where the spear had gone and Jesus then says Thomas put your hand here and place it on my side and then Thomas had said I will never believe unless and Jesus said to Thomas just do these things and believe and you know it's wonderful Thomas he's just he's absolutely blown away and all he can say is my Lord and my God and as I said I love the gentle way that Jesus deals with Thomas because Thomas refused to believe the testimony of the women who had seen

[25 : 08] Jesus refused to believe the testimony of their disciples he had put out conditions that these were the only conditions that he would accept and Jesus didn't rebuke him at all he was so gentle and you know that's a lesson to us because we can be harsh we can hurt our fellow Christians by what we say and by what we do by our attitude we talk of the gentleness of Jesus and we sometimes use that but when you home in in his life he was so gentle and compassionate and we need to learn from that but you know I believe the church is full of Thomas's who believe but can't believe that they believe because you know deep down Thomas didn't need much convincing he didn't need to put his finger into the nail prints he didn't need to put his hand into the side he didn't need to do any of these things and the church is full of people and I believe there are people like that here they believe that they still don't believe that they believe they can't believe that they believe they're looking for something else unless I have unless unless unless they're putting out conditions beyond just a believing and Jesus says it's just believing and Jesus then at the end he gives us almost what you could say his final beatitude blessed are those he said to Thomas because you have seen you have believed blessed are those whom having not seen yet believe and you know that's a wonderful blessing and that's where all of you today who love the Lord Jesus Christ are you have not seen but you still believe we have not seen the physical

Christ the earth that we have not seen anything we haven't even seen that picture we haven't seen our vision we haven't seen anything we just believe we see by faith and Jesus says blessing great blessing is upon all such have you today believed in Jesus that's that's what he's asking you to do the one who was the resurrection in the life he says believe in me if not as we said at the very beginning to the young folk don't talk about it in tomorrow's terms I don't want any person in here today saying I need to think about this I'll have a look at this tomorrow tomorrow never comes it's today if you hear my voice harden not your heart let's pray oh Lord we ask that you will bless us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places we pray that we may know the peace of God that passes all understanding we pray oh Lord that you will help us to believe because so often we have the

Thomas attitude and spirit within us we are like the man who came and he said Lord I believe help thou mine unbelief and so we pray that you will be with us and grant us the grace to truly believe in you watch over us and bless the cup of tea coffee in the hall and take us to our home safely and forgive us all our sin in Jesus name amen now concluding singing is from psalm number 17 and sing psalms and that's on page 18 psalm 17 and we sing verses 4 to 8 so that's from the from the middle of verse 4 to verse 8 from every evil path by your word I'm preserved my feet have held to all your ways from them I have not sworn

I call on you oh God for you will answer me oh turn your ear toward my prayer and hear my earnest plea display your steadfast love and save with your right hand all those who flee for help to you when foes against them stand and shadow of your wings hide me in times of strife and as the apple of your eye preserve and guard my life these verses on psalm 17 page 18 from every evil path by your word I'm preserved from every evil path by your word and you serve my feet and you to hold your ways from them

I have not sworn I call on you oh God what you will send me oh turn your love you wash my breath and heal my earnest free display your steadfast love and save with you right hand all who flee for help to you when foes against them stand in shadow of your wings hide me in times of love and at the apple of your life preserve and guard my life now may the grace mercy and peace of God the Father

[32 : 09] Son and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forever more amen Lord to breathe in heaven thanks to you and the'll and increase women in seja grows