



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ♦ DEO ♦ GLORIA

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

The Resurrected Christ Appears to Thomas

John 20:24-29

November 5, 2006

I. The Stubborn Skepticism of Thomas

II. The Appearance of Jesus

a. The Timing

b. The Words

III. The Confession of Thomas

a. The Basis [of his Confession]

b. The Substance [of his Confession]

IV. The Blessing of Jesus

I. The Stubborn Skepticism of Thomas

- ❑ In Verses 24-25, John the Evangelist makes it clear that Thomas, called Didymus [which means *Twin*] was not with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them in the closed room.
- ❑ It is a powerful truth that in God’s providence, He ensured Thomas’ absence during His first appearance, which would lead to Thomas’ skeptic comment and then to his great confession in Verse 28 [‘My Lord and my God’].
- ❑ Verse 25 states that “the other disciples were saying to him [Thomas], ‘We have seen the Lord!’”
- ❑ In response to the disciples’ claim, Thomas responds, ‘Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.’

- John Calvin notes that Thomas’s words reflect a faith based upon ‘sensual judgment’, that is judgment ‘founded on the perception of the senses.’
 - Is this not the way that most people today are? They refuse to believe in anything that is not based upon ‘sensual judgment’ – they must ‘see it to believe it.’
 - Yet, seeing *alone* is NEVER believing! There must be a sovereign, supernatural work of God *within* the individual before one *can* [i.e., has the ability to] believe.
 - This truth is evident not only in this passage, but throughout the whole of Scripture. The Old Testament and the New are filled with narrative after narrative that describes people who beheld the clear hand of God, yet still remained unbelieving.
 - Certainly, as Charles Spurgeon once said, ‘I am not sure that there is not a slight touch of Thomas in most of us.’
- These words have earned Thomas the nick-name, ‘Doubting Thomas,’ but rather than setting conditions for his own personal belief in the resurrected Lord, Thomas is quite possibly pointing out the absolute absurdity of their claims. It is as though he is saying, ‘before I believe *that*, I would first...’
- Dutch Theologian Herman Ridderbos wrote, ‘Thomas’s unbelief does not mean that he – like the people in Cana (4:48) – wants to see signs and wonders before he believes. It means, rather, that he rejects as impossible the whole idea of the miracle of which his fellow disciples are talking. So it is not as a miracle-hungry Thomas but as the skeptical Thomas that he appears on the scene here again.’
- Some have also suggested that Thomas’s skepticism is not just that he doubts that Jesus has been raised from the dead, but also that he doubts the judgment of his fellow disciples – perhaps their minds are playing tricks on them, or maybe they saw a ghost.
- A final possibility may be that Thomas was so personally devastated at the crucifixion of Jesus, that he cannot imagine such a tragedy being reversed [and so quickly – it has only been two to three days since Jesus was crucified].
- Every biblical reader, however, must conclude that Thomas’s words reflect that he did not consider even the possibility of the resurrection of Christ.
- Furthermore, Thomas’s skepticism reveals that he is in no way ‘seeking’ God or the resurrected Christ – as a matter of fact, he considers such a possibility foolish!

- As 1 Corinthians 1:18 states: ‘For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.’

II. The Appearance of Jesus

- Much like His appearance to the [10] disciples earlier, Jesus appears to Thomas in spite of monumental physical and spiritual obstacles. Further, the timing and the words of Jesus, with respect to this appearance, underscore the true identity of our Lord: He is not only fully man, but He is fully God!
- Also, the doors to the room where the disciples are [possibly] hiding are shut [or ‘locked’]. Yet, once again, Jesus appears to His disciples, and specifically Thomas, in spite of the locked doors [and darkened understandings].
- Finally, Jesus, as before, says, ‘Peace be with you,’ comforting His disciples at a time of great distress.

a. The Timing

- John writes, in Verse 26, ‘After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst...’
 - The main point that John is making here, is that it has now been **eight days since Thomas made his skeptical comment** [‘Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails...’].
 - This truth is absolutely necessary in understanding the context in which Thomas will make his powerful confession.
 - Also, eight days later would make it one week after Easter Sunday, also a Sunday. This may be significant as it is emphasizing the importance of the Lord’s Day.

b. The Words

- John continues by saying that Jesus says, ‘Peace be with you.’ And **then He said to Thomas**, ‘Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.’
- With His words Jesus accomplishes [at least] four things:
 - First, He invites Thomas to do the very thing he said he *must* do in order to believe.
 - Secondly, they confirm that Jesus does not merely *appear* to be human – He **is** fully human [although He is in a glorified state].

- Gnosticism and its related heresy, Docetism, claimed that Jesus only *appeared* to be human. However, if Jesus was not **just like us in our humanity, He could not have been our representative on the cross! He had to be, in His humanity, flesh and bone like us – and He was!**
- Thirdly, with His words, Jesus commands Thomas **to believe**.
- Finally, He demonstrates that He possessed supernatural knowledge, for Jesus was not visibly present when Thomas uttered his skeptical statement eight days earlier!

III. The Confession of Thomas

a. The Basis [of his Confession]

- Immediately after Jesus' words, Thomas gives one of the most succinct, yet powerful, confessions of faith in all of Scripture, 'My Lord and my God!'
- John never states whether or not Thomas actually touched the side of Jesus; however, **I believe that Thomas did not touch Jesus before he believed.**
- If this is, indeed, the case, then Jesus proved Thomas quite wrong, for Thomas said, 'Unless I...;' yet, it very well may be the case that Thomas never touched Jesus' side; rather, he may have simply **heard, seen, and then believed!**
- D.A. Carson writes, '...Thomas was so overcome with awe and reverence that he immediately uttered his confession.'

Leon Morris writes, "But Thomas was not such a skeptic as he thought he was. At the sight of Jesus all his doubts vanished and he did not need to apply any of his tests. It is possible that it was the words of Jesus more than anything that brought conviction, for they showed that Jesus was perfectly aware of what Thomas had laid down as his demands."

- 'The confession sounds more like a direct and spontaneous reaction to Jesus' appearance and words, which totally overwhelm Thomas.' Herman Ridderbos
- Further, as with his fellow disciples, it is quite amazing how quickly, the appearance and words of Jesus transform the skepticism of Thomas into joy.
- Given the context of the passage, it seems as though it was the **words** that Jesus spoke **directly to Thomas** that proved to be the decisive factor in Thomas's belief. Yet, the physical [albeit glorified] presence of Jesus most certainly authenticated and confirmed the words of Thomas's fellow disciples – that they had, indeed, seen the Lord!

b. The Essence [of his Confession]

- ❑ Once again, Thomas's confession, in Verse 28, is both concise and profound, for he cries, 'My Lord and my God!'
- ❑ It is essential to begin analyzing Thomas's confession by first understanding that it was personal.
- ❑ Thomas does not merely say, 'Lord...God!' He was not quoting what someone else had said about Jesus. For, he says, '**My** Lord and **my** God.'
- ❑ It is certainly ironic that immediately upon seeing and hearing Jesus, the greatest doubter becomes the greatest confessor!
- ❑ Such a personal confession of Jesus as Lord and God is most definitely what is required of all who claim to be followers of Christ.
- ❑ However, the most significant point of Thomas's confession is that he declares Jesus his **Lord and God**.
 - Many view this confession, and rightfully so, as a declaration of Jesus Christ as the Word-made-Flesh (John 1:14).
 - Jesus is the perfect God-man; the One who was *with* God, yet who *was* God (John 1:1).
 - In other words, such a statement [Lord and God] points to the two natures of Christ: He is fully God ['my God?'] and fully Man ['My Lord?']. The reason for this is that it was common for people to refer to men of great respect as 'Lord.'
 - Often times Jesus is referred to as 'Lord' simply as a title of respect [such as 'sir' today]; yet, here, coupled with '...and my God...' the title must take on its fullest meaning.

John Calvin, in his commentary on the Gospel of John, wrote:

But *Thomas*, having acknowledged him to be *Lord*, is immediately carried upwards to his eternal Divinity, and justly; for the reason why Christ descended to us, and first was humbled, and afterwards was placed at the Father's right hand, and obtained dominion over heaven and earth, was, that he might exalt us to his own Divine glory, and to the glory of the Father. That our faith may arrive at the eternal Divinity of Christ., we must begin with that knowledge which is nearer and more easily acquired. Thus it has been justly said by some, that by Christ *Man* we are conducted to Christ *God*, because our faith makes such gradual progress that, perceiving Christ on earth, born in a stable, and hanging on a cross., it rises to the glory of his resurrection, and, proceeding onwards, comes at length to his eternal life and power, in which his Divine Majesty is gloriously displayed.

- Also, in the Old Testament, both Lord and God were used in reference to Yahweh:

Stir up Yourself, and awake to my right
 And to my cause, my God and my Lord.
 Judge me, O LORD my God, according to Your righteousness,
 And do not let them rejoice over me. Psalm 35:23-24

- In the Greco-Roman world, the expression 'Lord and God' was used in Emperor worship. The Roman emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96) desired to be addressed as *dominus et deus noster*, 'our Lord and our God' (Suetonius, *Domitian* 13:2).
 - Thus, Thomas's confession was also likely used as a counter to the Emperor worship of the first century.
- Of course, in Philippians 2:5-11 the Apostle Paul speaks every tongue confessing Jesus Christ as 'Lord to the glory of God the Father.'
- Yet, whereas scholars may debate the meaning of 'Lord' in Thomas's confession, there appears little doubt as to Thomas's understanding of Jesus' identity when he uses the words '...my God...'.
 - Scholar B.A. Mastin states, '[this is] the one verse in the New Testament which does unquestionably describe Christ as God.'
- Thomas is quite clearly asserting that Jesus is fully God, equal in essence and honor with the Father. For, as John 5:23 states, '...all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father.'

IV. The Blessing of Jesus

- John concludes this section, in Verse 29, with a beatitude from Jesus, 'Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.'
 - Scholars differ on whether or not the first part of Verse 29 should be a statement or a question [as the NASB does].
 - However, either way it does not greatly effect the overall meaning of the passage.
 - In the first part of Verse 29, Jesus is making two points:
 - First, He is acknowledging that Thomas has, in fact, seen Him. The physical sight of Thomas has most certainly played a role in his faith in the risen Christ [although it is most certainly not the sole basis of Thomas's faith].
 - Secondly, that Thomas has believed. In other words, Thomas's faith is legitimate.

- After asking the question, ‘Because you have seen me, have you believed?’ [or it could be a statement, depending on the interpretation (‘Because you have seen Me, you have believed’)] Jesus says, ‘**Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.**’
 - This statement is one of only two beatitudes in all of the Gospel of John.
 - The word ‘blessed’ is often interpreted as ‘happy.’ However, a more appropriate interpretation would be ‘approved or accepted by God.’
 - Therefore, Jesus is anticipating a day when believers in the Lord Jesus Christ will not be given the physical evidence of sight and sound [and possibly touch] that Thomas was given.
 - This will occur because Jesus will ascend to the Father, send His Holy Spirit, and ensure the completion of the canon of Scripture.
 - Peter explains this truth in his Epistle:

‘...and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.’ 1 Peter 1:8-9

- Furthermore, the Apostle Paul, writing to the Romans Christians *after* Pentecost, writes, ‘So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.’ Romans 10:17
- Yet, it was necessary for Christ to appear to Thomas in the manner in which He did, for the appearance of the resurrected Lord, in a very real sense, qualified Thomas as an Apostle of the early Church [Acts 1:8, 21-22; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8; Galatians 1:12; Ephesians 3:2-8; 1 John 1:1-3].

“Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us – beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us – one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” Acts 1:21-22

“Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?” 1 Corinthians 9:1

“What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life – and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us – what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” 1 John 1:1-3

- Not only this, but the church itself is based upon the eyewitness testimony of these Apostles to whom Jesus chose to reveal Himself.

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.” Ephesians 2:19-22

- ❖ Therefore, C.K. Barrett was correct when he wrote, ‘but for the fact that Thomas and the other apostles saw the incarnate Christ there would have been no Christian faith at all.’