

John (129): Christ's second public appearance

For the previous weeks, we have been considering our Savior's post-resurrection appearances. Thus far, John has recorded two of them—first, He revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene, secondly, He revealed Himself to His assembled church. Both of these appearances were on the first Lord's Day. The first was in the morning, the second one in the evening.

We come this week, to our Savior's third appearance on the following Lord's Day. We will examine our passage under the theme – Christ's second public appearance to His beloved people, and we shall consider this theme with the help of four main headings: The unbelief of Thomas, The Invitation of Christ, The Confession of Thomas, The Blessing of Christ.

Now, in the history of the church the name Thomas has taken a beating. It has become synonymous with doubt and unbelief. The phrase "doubting Thomas" is even used by the world to describe someone unwilling to believe something. But as we shall see this morning, I think most of us, if not all of us, have more in common with Thomas than we may think.

I. The Unbelief of Thomas (vv24-25); II. The Invitation of Christ (vv26-27); III. The Confession of Thomas (v28); IV. The Blessing of Christ (v29)

I. The Unbelief of Thomas—vv24-25

1. The first thing we notice is that Thomas was absent the previous week when Jesus first met with His disciples.
2. V24—"Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came"—where he was, we are not told.
3. It seems most likely, as we read further into the passage, Thomas was missing because he was overtaken with unbelief.
4. At some point after that first meeting, the disciples inform Thomas that Christ had revealed Himself to them and showed them His wounds.
5. V25—"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.'"
6. Here we find the stubborn resolve of Thomas' unbelief—he refused to believe unless he saw the resurrected body.
7. Unless I see that very same person who was crucified and laid in the tomb, stand before me, I will not believe.
8. Thomas was not content with hearing that Christ had risen; nor would he be content with seeing that Christ had risen—Thomas needed to touch Him.
9. He needed to put his hands into the very wounds of the Savior—Thomas was resolved, that without this evidence, he would not believe.
10. Obs.1—True Christians at times fall prey to doubt and unbelief—this observation, obviously, comes from Thomas.
11. Thomas was a true Christian—he believed in Christ—he loved Christ—he has left all for Christ—and yet, he was an unbeliever.
12. Thomas wasn't an unbeliever in the fullest sense. No. He believed. He believed he was a sinner and Christ was his Savior.
13. But Thomas was, what we might call, an unbelieving believer—he was a true Christian overtaken with doubt and unbelief.
14. Thus, let me briefly suggest two results of lingering doubt and/or unbelief which are evidenced in many true Christians.
15. (a) Little desire for fellowship—that is, those overcome with doubt and unbelief, often desire to separate themselves.
16. This is tragically illustrated in Thomas, who, unlike the other disciples, refused to gather with the church to worship.

17. And here's the problem, its failure to assemble with God's people, or isolationism, that helps to foster doubt and unbelief.
18. Let me say this as plainly as I can—failure to assemble with God's people, on God's day, perpetuates doubt and unbelief.
19. Had Thomas been present on that first Lord's Day evening, he would have seen Christ for himself and had his doubts removed.
20. But no—he chose instead to absent himself and thus he continued his distress—he isolated himself to his own harm.
21. Brethren, it's always a reason for concern, when a Christian begins to isolate themselves from the flock and shepherds.
22. Just think back to what we learned last week—Christ assembled with His people to bless, send, and equip them.
23. Thomas missed out on all this. Instead of having his peace increased he finds himself in further distress and despair.
24. Alexander Maclaren—"The worst thing that a man can do when disbelief, doubt, or coldness shrouds his sky, and blots out the stars, is to go away alone and shut himself up with his own, perhaps morbid, or, at all events, disturbing thoughts. The best thing that he can do is go amongst his fellows. If the sermon does not do him any good, the prayers and the praises and the sense of brotherhood will help him."
25. (b) Lack of personal assurance—this is an obvious sign or symptom of doubt and unbelief—you may not doubt the resurrection, as Thomas did, but you doubt the efficacy of that resurrection for yourself.
26. I think for many Christians, this is where most doubt and unbelief exists—they don't doubt the facts of the Bible, but the question whether those facts apply to them.
27. Now, don't get me wrong, it's very possible that Satan would seek to create within us, doubts about the facts of the gospel.
28. But remember, Thomas's doubts, were highly personally—remember, the disciples were at a unique place in redemptive history.
29. Thomas didn't merely disbelieve the resurrection—he thought that with Christ, all of his hopes were dead too.
30. Obs.2—Christians must keep an eye on other Christians—how did the other disciples treat their error brother?
31. V25—"The other disciples therefore said to him, 'We have seen the Lord'"—brethren, we are our brother's keeper.
32. A.W. Pink—"The ten disciples did not say, 'O, well, there is no need for us to be troubled; he is the loser; if he had been in his proper place, he, too, would have seen the Savior, heard His blessing of Peace be unto you, and received the Holy Spirit; but he was not here, and it only serves him right that he should suffer for his negligence; let us leave him alone.' O, no. The selfish world may reason and act thus; but not so those who are truly constrained by the love of Christ. The more we love Him, the more shall we love His people."
33. 1Thess.5:14—"Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all."

II. The Invitation of Christ—vv26-27

1. From v26 we learn, "after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them"—that is, they were again assembled in the same room as before.
2. The phrase "after eight days" means one week later, and thus the NIV rightly renders it—"A week later the disciples were in the house again."
3. Simply put, the Jews often referred to a week as eight days, and thus the OT refers to the first day as the eighth day.
4. As a result, if we were to compare Lk.9:28 with Matt.17:1, we would find that what Luke calls "eight days" Matthew refers to as "a week."
5. As I have said before, it's evident that the disciples viewed the first day of the week to have deep religious significance.

6. Thus, they gathered together on the first Sunday Jesus was resurrected, and then they gathered again a week later.
7. A.W. Pink—"After eight days' signifies, according to the Jewish manner of reckoning time after a week. It was, therefore, on the second Christian sabbath that the Eleven assembled together, this time Thomas being present."
8. V27—"Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.'"
9. Here we behold the loving patience of Christ—He doesn't strongly rebuke Thomas, but extends a gracious invitation.
10. In short, our Savior bid Thomas to touch His hands and side, to prove that He has in fact, risen from the dead.
11. Now, if you notice, our Savior repeats the exact language that Thomas had earlier used, as found in verse 25.
12. V25—"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."
13. V27—"Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.'"
14. This last phrase is a subtle rebuke—"Do not be unbelieving (perhaps better – Stop unbelieving), and start believing.
15. Obs.1—Behold the condescending patience of Christ toward unbelieving saints—we typically use the word condescending in a negative way.
16. A person is condescending if they look down upon others in pride and arrogance—but this is not the way we use it with regards to God.
17. Because God is above and beyond us, every aspect of revelation from God to man is a condescension on His part.
18. It's God stooping down to reveal Himself to mankind—creation, revelation, redemption are all expressions of God's loving condescension.
19. And here in our Savior's interaction with Thomas, we find a most amazing example of our Savior's patient condescension.
20. How does He act toward his unbelieving disciple? He accommodates his request and reveals Himself personally to him.
21. Thus, what does this say to us, as God's Thomases? We must bring our doubts and unbelief to Christ for removal.
22. We must say with that father in Mark 9:24—"I believe; help my unbelief!"—O God, help me as your believing, unbelieving child.
23. And dear Christian, perhaps the best way to combat remaining doubts and unbelief, is to follow Thomas's example.
24. Get alone with Christ, and, as it were, place the hands of your heart afresh into the wounds of a crucified, resurrected Savior.
25. Obs.2—Behold the condescending patience of Christ toward unbelieving sinners—this patience is shown to all men.
26. Dear brethren, surely we know that God has made His existence evident to all from creation as well as conscience.
27. God has, as it were, stooped down to speak to man through the wind and the waves, in every leaf and drop of water.
28. More than this, God has stooped down to speak to us in the Holy Scriptures, in which we hear His voice clearer.
29. And then if this is not enough—for most of you hear present—He has stooped again to speak to you through parents and pastors.
30. Oh my friends, God never turns away a sincere seeker—He never rejects that poor soul who thirsts for salvation.
31. The problem isn't with God it's with man. Native man doesn't desire to seek God on God's terms and for God's truth.

32. I was recently talking to a young man who claimed to be seeking after God and His truth, but was frustrated God hadn't revealed Himself to him.
33. And as I talked to him further, it became evident that he refused to believe the basic teachings of the Holy Scriptures.
34. No, this young man was not a seeker of truth, he was a seeker of his own truth—he was NOT a Thomas in any sense.
35. Dear friends, this is the error of so many sinners—they get sidetracked with all many of secondary theological issues.
36. They think they can't come to Christ until they first understand every minute truth, from creation to the second coming.
37. Most coming sinners believe these things—of course—but nobody was every saved because they believed these things.
38. Your business, poor sinners, is in the first place come to see your utter depravity, and what your sin has caused.
39. And then you must say with Thomas—"I need to 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."
40. Jn.7:16-17—"My doctrine (teaching) is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone desires to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority."

III. The Confession of Thomas—v28

1. V28—"And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'"—this may be the most famous confession in the whole Bible.
2. Having seen and touched His Lord, Thomas obeyed Christ, and ceased being unbelieving and became believing.
3. (1) It was experiential—by this I mean, Thomas came to learn this confession by seeing and touching the crucified and resurrected Christ.
4. We must keep in mind the important connection between v27 and v28—what was the cause behind his confession.
5. He was unbelieving and now he was believing—what made the difference—well, he heard, saw, and touched Christ.
6. Now, I believe that in addition to seeing and touching the Lord, it was Jesus told him that further convinced him.
7. No one had seen Jesus since the previous Lord's Day—how did Jesus know what he said about seeing and touching his hands and side?
8. The only way Jesus could have known what Thomas previously said was, because He was his Lord and his God.
9. (2) It was theological—"My Lord and my God"—though the word "lord" can merely mean "sir" as it's applied to Christ it means "sovereign" or "Master."
10. The second word, *theos*, simply means God--and is an obvious declaration and affirmation of Christ's full deity.
11. Thus, the book of John nearly ends on a similar note as it began, Jn.1:1—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."
12. (3) It was personal—"My Lord and My God"—Thomas underscores the fact that Christ was His Lord and God.
13. In other words—his confession was far from a dry affirmation of facts—it was the expression of a heart conquered by the facts.
14. Or perhaps better stated—it was the expression of a heart captured by the person of the facts—by Christ Himself.
15. In other words—Thomas' confession was more than an intellectual admission, but was the expression of the heart.
16. My friends, surely we know, you can believe that Jesus is Lord and God, and be no better than the demons (for James tells us the demons believe that God is one and tremble).

17. You have to believe that He is your Lord and your God—you have to personally bow the knee and own Him as such.

IV. The Blessing of Christ—v29

1. V29—"Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"
2. Our Savior ends His discussion with Thomas by affirming he believed—he believed because he saw and touched Christ.
3. And yet, our Savior goes on to say—those who believe without physically seeing—are also or equally blessed.
4. Jesus is not teaching, that those who believe without physically seeing Him are more blessed, but they are equally blessed.
5. In other words—those who would believe upon Him after He returned to heaven, would not be any worst for it.
6. And hears the reasons. They would have the fuller revelation of the NT Scriptures within which they would see and hear Christ.
7. In other words—they would still see, only not with their physical eyes, but with the spiritual eyes of their hearts.
8. 1Pet.1:8—"whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory."
9. In fact, there is a sense in which to believe without seeing Christ, gives more honor to God and to His holy word.
10. All of the disciples should have believed without seeing—the fact that they needed to see and touch Christ proved the weakness of their faith.
11. Strong faith always takes God at His word—it believes what God says—it doesn't need any carnal sight to assist it.
12. Now, our Savior again speaks about believing—"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."
13. Believed what? Believed what Thomas confessed in the previous verse—we have to believe He is our Lord and our God.
14. Lesson 1—Christian, don't think that you are less privileged because you've been born after Christ has returned to heaven.
15. Lesson 2—Christian, don't think what the world needs is visible evidence, what they need is to hear the truth of God's word (faith comes by hearing the word of truth).
16. Lesson 3—Poor sinner, what you need to believe is what the word of God says—it calls you to believe in Christ as your Lord and God.
17. And the way you believe in Him as Lord and God, is that you believe He was resurrected from the dead as He promised.
18. You must believe that God was, in some sense crucified and resurrected, and the only way that could have happened was the incarnation.
19. You have to believe that God's eternal Son came to earth and became a man, so that He could die for our sins.
20. Dear young people—your pastors and parents can tell the truth, but unless you by faith see Christ for yourself, you will never believe.
21. The ten disciples saw Christ the week prior, and they told this to Thomas—but he would not believe their word.
22. He had to see for himself—and my dear young people, you too have to believe for yourself—you have to believe His word.
23. But you know what—there is a sense in which, just as Christ was physically present that second Lord's Day—He is uniquely present by His Spirit.
24. And all you have to do is, like doubting Thomas, reach out by faith, and touch His hands, His feet, and His side.

25. Hear what He says to you this morning—"Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do be unbelieving, but believing."