

ECF 2nd August 2020 John 20:24-31 Believe Without Seeing

Have ever felt like you were the odd one out, that you just don't fit in with everybody around? A friend of mine did. He was unemployed for a while and wanted to stay active, so he took up swimming in his local pool.

One day as he got into the pool he noticed a group of people doing water aerobics and so he thought he would join them. So he followed along with all their exercises.

At the end of the session, people started to climb out of the pool. He was really surprised, as the first person to get out was an expectant mother. He was even more surprised when the next person to get out was also a pregnant woman. In fact everyone else in the exercise group were expectant mothers.

It was only then he realised that he had just been part of a woman's prenatal exercise class! He really was the odd man out.

I think that's how Thomas must have felt when he first heard the news that Jesus had risen from the dead. He was the odd one out because he couldn't enter into their excitement or joy. He couldn't believe what they said without seeing what they saw.

John 20:24-31: "Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

1. A Missed Opportunity

We don't know why the other 10 disciples were all together on that resurrection night, but not Thomas. We don't know why "Thomas... was not with the disciples when Jesus came." John 20:24.

Was it that he felt that he needed to deal with his grief over Jesus' death on his own? Did he have other responsibilities to attend to? Or was he so disillusioned by the events of Good Friday, that he didn't feel as if he could face the others.

We don't know. But we do know what he missed because of that decision.

- He didn't visit the empty tomb.
- He didn't see the folded grave clothes.
- He didn't hear the excited report from Mary Magdalene or the two on the road to Emmaus.
- And most importantly of all, he didn't meet the Risen Christ. He missed hearing Jesus declare his resurrection peace, commission them to preach the good news of forgiveness of sins and promise the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

a) Don't Miss Out

It is a serious reminder to us of how important it is for us to meet together as a church as much as we're able. Hebrews 10:25 says, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

Often when we are struggling, when we're going through difficult times, when we're really upset, we can be tempted to pull away from fellowship, isolate ourselves from our church family, try and cope on our own.

But as Christians we need each other. We need to meet together. We need to encourage one another. We need to seek God's presence together and listen to his Word together.

If we choose to stay away, you never know what we might miss. So don't miss out. We need to be like the early church who "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Acts 2:42

2. A Common Struggle

Thomas was not there that Sunday night, and so he missed out on meeting the Lord. And so later in the week, when Thomas eventually turned up, he must have been so shocked.

Instead of his friends being discouraged, dejected and defeated, they were filled with excitement and joy. They shared with him the most incredible news: [“We have seen the Lord.”](#) John 20:25.

In fact, John wrote here that they kept telling him. They were so full of joy that they went on and on about how amazing that experience was and how wonderful it was to know that Jesus was alive.

But Thomas couldn't share in their excitement or joy. He said to them, [“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”](#) John 20:25

Literally, Thomas said here, “I positively will not believe.” It was as if he was saying, “That’s it. End of the conversation. And I don’t want to hear about it anymore.” For Thomas, the resurrection of Jesus was too big a deal just to accept on the basis of what the other disciples said.

He refused to take their word for it. He refused to accept the evidence they presented to him. He wouldn't believe unless he saw and touched the risen Christ for himself.

And so for a week, Thomas was on the fringe, not understanding or entering into their joy. Uncomfortable. Isolated. The odd one out.

Maybe you're here this morning and you feel just like him. Maybe you have a nagging doubt that this talk about Jesus dying and rising again seems just too far-fetched. Maybe it sounds unreasonable, like a comforting myth or elaborate hoax.

Or maybe you struggle to believe some other aspect of the gospel. Maybe you don't feel loved by God. Maybe you struggle to believe that you can be accepted by him, completely forgiven and adopted into his family. Or maybe you doubt whether your life will ever be transformed, whether you could ever live out his purpose for you or experience his power in you.

Maybe you look around at church this morning and you feel like the one out.

a) Not the Odd One Out

But you're not. Thomas wasn't really the odd one out. I know that he is often called 'Doubting Thomas' but as we've seen throughout this chapter, most of the disciples struggled to believe in the resurrection of Jesus until they saw him for themselves.

When they heard from the women about the message from the angels, [“They did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.”](#) Luke 24:11

When Peter saw the empty tomb and folded graveclothes, [“He went away, wondering to himself what had happened.”](#) Luke 24:12

The disciples didn't believe the first reports that Jesus was alive. They needed to be convinced through irrefutable evidence. And even then, even after all of these events, some of them still struggled to believe. Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, [“When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.”](#) Matthew 28:17

Thomas wasn't the odd one out. He was just like the rest of them – struggling to believe without seeing the evidence for himself.

Doubts are something most, if not all of us, experience. Martin Lloyd Jones said this: “Doubts are not incompatible with faith... Some people seem to think that once you become a Christian you should never be assailed by doubts. But that is not so... Doubts will attack us, but that does not mean that we are to allow them to master us.”

So if you're struggling with faith this morning, don't condemn yourself. We can be honest and authentic about our doubts because really, we're all in the same boat. This is a common struggle.

But that doesn't mean we just need to live in our doubts. This doesn't mean we need to miss out on the joy and excitement

of what the Risen Christ wants to give us.

3. A Gracious Revelation

Jesus didn't leave Thomas in his doubts. Instead a week later, he appeared to the disciples again for the express purpose of helping Thomas to overcome them.

The disciples were all together again, this time with Thomas. The doors were locked again. And Jesus' first words were again, "Peace be with you!" John 20:26 As we saw last week, only the Risen Lord can give us real peace – peace with God, with others and with ourselves.

But then Jesus turned to Thomas: "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side." John 20:27

Jesus knew all about Thomas' doubts. He knew what he had decided and what he had said. But he didn't condemn Thomas. He didn't reject him. He didn't discard him and exclude him from his family.

Instead he gently and graciously offered Thomas the evidence that he had demanded so that he could believe. He showed Thomas the nail marks in his hands, and the wound from the spear in his side.

Jesus didn't need to do this. Thomas had no right to demand this. But in love, Jesus did this to help Thomas move from doubt to faith: "Stop doubting and believe." John 20:27.

a) Don't Stay In Unbelief

And Jesus wants to help us with our struggles with faith too. Of course we can't see Jesus physically with our own eyes. But that doesn't mean we need to miss out. Jesus said that we can be especially blessed. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." John 20:29

But this does not mean we need to have a blind faith, without any evidence. There are many convincing proofs that Jesus is alive for us today. This is why John wrote his gospel. He wrote: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe..." John 20:30-31

And so today:

- We have the historical record of the empty tomb, written within living memory of the events it describes.
- We have the inability of the Romans and religious authorities to counter the resurrection claims by producing a body.
- We have the testimony of those who saw the folded grave clothes, who heard the angel message and who saw the Risen Lord for themselves.
- We have the transformation of these disciples from a weak and fearful group into a world-changing movement.
- We have the willingness of the disciples to suffer and die for their faith, without ever retracting their claims to have seen the Risen Lord!
- And we also have the continuing impact of Jesus in people's lives today, including many of us here.

This morning, we don't need to see Jesus face to face to be convinced that the resurrection is true. We can simply examine the evidence that is available and we can move from doubt to faith!

4. An Appropriate Response

But if we do that, then we need to respond as Thomas did. When he saw Jesus and was invited to put his finger in his nail-scarred hands, and his hand into his wounded side, Thomas declared, "My Lord and my God." John 20:28

a) Declare Jesus is Lord

This is an unmistakably clear declaration of the deity of Jesus. For Thomas, the resurrection proved who Jesus really is. He is not only fully man, but he is also fully God. As Paul wrote, Jesus, "was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead." Romans 1:4.

And so Thomas' words here are in many ways the high-point, the summit, of this gospel. This is the key question that John was trying to answer in his gospel. "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." John 20:31

This is how he started his gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1

And this is what numerous people have testified to throughout – people like John the Baptist (John 1:34), Nathanael (John 1:49), Peter (John 6:69), the healed blind man (John 9:35) and Martha (John 11:27). They’ve all declared the deity of Christ!

And this is what Jesus himself claimed through his seven I Am Sayings and seven I Am Statements and what he demonstrated through his seven miraculous signs.

And amazingly, God chose Thomas, the one known as the doubter, to conclude all of this convincing evidence. It should encourage us that God will accept our faith in Jesus, even if we at times struggle with doubt.

b) **Accept Jesus As Our Lord**

But Thomas didn’t just declare the identity of Jesus here. In the Roman Empire, people worshipped the Emperor. John and his readers were probably familiar with devotees who would chant their slogan, ‘Caesar is Lord, Caesar is God!’

So when Thomas said **“My Lord and my God.”** John 20:28 he was rejecting the Emperor’s claims on his worship. Instead, he was personally declaring his allegiance to Jesus! He was committing himself to Jesus and accepting his rule over his life.

And we too live in a world where there are so many false gods – gods of money, career, family, possessions, sports, popularity, even our own satisfaction. But we are called to reject all of these false gods and instead personally trust in Jesus as our Saviour and commit our lives to him as our Lord.

This is the only appropriate response to believing in Jesus. We cannot receive Jesus into our lives, if we are not willing to bow before him and allow him to be Lord of it all! As Jesus himself said, **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”** Luke 9:23

5. **An Amazing Offer**

Of course this is a challenge. There is a cost in doing this. But if we do this, what we gain is far greater.

Those scars that Jesus showed to Thomas are the record of his payment of our sin. And his resurrection is proof that this payment was fully accepted by God. They are the receipt proving that if we trust in him there is nothing more required for us to be right with God.

Through his faith in Jesus, Thomas experienced real, abundant and eternal life. Through bowing before Jesus and accepting him as Lord and God, he received a new life with a new nature and a new power, and his place in heaven was forever guaranteed.

And we have that same opportunity today. John wrote his gospel so that we would believe in Jesus, **“and that by believing you may have life in his name.”** John 20:31

a) **Life to the Full**

If we examine the evidence and put our trust in Jesus, as the forgiver of our sins and the leader of our lives, then no matter what the cost, it will be worth it, because we will experience life in all its fullness.

Those nail-scarred hands and spear-pierced side declare that Jesus is alive, and because of this, **“He is able to save completely those who come to God through him.”** Hebrews 7:25

Conclusion

Thomas may have initially been the odd one out. However, when he was confronted with the evidence, he became a powerful witness to the reality of who Jesus is and what he can do in each of our lives.

And I pray that even although we’ve not seen Jesus face to face, we will believe in him, accepting him as our Saviour and our Lord, and experiencing his life in all its fullness.

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