



## A compassionate Christ and a doubting disciple

**John 20:26-29**

Every one of our Lord's post-resurrection appearances had a very special purpose. When we consider the purpose of Jesus' visitation with Thomas, we come face to face with an ever longsuffering Lord who always deals kindly and compassionately with His disciples who are oh so slow to learn. If ever there was a time when Jesus had reason to rebuke a disciple, then this was surely it. It was Thomas, after all, who had defiantly declared,

*"Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."*

(John 20:25)

Thomas at times is referred to as "Doubting Thomas" but, in essence, this is not so. These words bespeak outright unbelief! And yet, when the Lord appears to him, He does not say to Thomas, "Where were you when I came to the others eight days ago?" or "Why are you so wickedly unbelieving?" All our Lord says is, *"Peace be unto you."*

Perhaps nowhere in the Gospels do we see more vividly displayed the immensity of our Lord's tender mercy towards His obtuse and erring disciple. Many of us would sooner or later have been provoked or perplexed by the likes of Thomas, yet the Lord Jesus does not deal with him in this way. From the start, He had known Thomas was a man who saw the darker side of life. He was the one who, when Jesus was going up to tend to Lazarus who was sick, said, *"Let us also go, that we may die with him."* In the Upper Room, when Jesus said that He was leaving them, returning to His Father's house, stating that they know the way He is taking, Thomas, in despair, cries out, *"Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?"*

And now, when Thomas openly questions the resurrection of Christ, the Lord condescends to directly address each of Thomas's statements of unbelief, one by one:

*"Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails ... **behold my hands,**"*

*"and put my finger into the print of the nails ... **reach hither thy finger,**"*

*"and thrust my hand into his side ... **reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side,**"*

*"I will not believe ... **and be not faithless, but believing.**"*

All of his brutish ignorance (Ps. 73:22), all of his unrealistic demands (Matt. 12:39), and all of his senseless questioning is dealt with in infinite grace. Hearing these words, Thomas recognizes that Jesus is condescending to meet every one of his foolish demands, even giving a gentle rebuke for his lack of faith. *"Stop being unbelieving, my beloved one, and simply believe"* (cf. Mark 5:36). Thomas was propelled then to confess, *"My Lord and my God,"* which was possibly one of the greatest statements to ever come from the lips of any of the apostles. Twice he speaks the personal possessive "my," indicating heartfelt appropriation of Christ's lordship.

Here are three practical lessons:

- In this interchange that takes place between the risen Lord and Thomas, we have the heart of God revealed to stubborn and dull sinners like ourselves. Demanding a sign, the very thing that God condemns because it reveals a heart of unbelief, is dealt with according to the weakness of faith of the individual. This passage is in our Bibles for our benefit to supply abundant evidence that Jesus is rich in patience and compassion and bears long with the infirmities of His people.

*“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.”*

(Ps. 103:13)

Let us make sure we do the same with others. Let us not look down on those whose faith is feeble and whose love is cold. As J. C. Ryle so poignantly says,

*“The Lord has many weak children in His family, many dull pupils in His school and many lame sheep in His fold. Yet He bears with them all and casts none away.”*

- Unbelief is so often the plague of our own hearts. “We must ever be seeing or we will never be believing” when the Bible clearly tells us we walk by faith and not by sight. We demand some kind of sign from the Lord to prove Himself. Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.
- Let us not fail to see, in this glorious faith confession of this once beleaguered and desponding disciple, the divinity of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. These words unequivocally prove that Jesus is God. If this were not true, all of the grand doctrines of Christianity would have no significance – the atonement for sin, His holy priesthood, His mediation, or His redemption. But as God, He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to the Father by Him.

Once Thomas had made his bold confession his comfortless and desponding predisposition was banished forever. He went forth with the other apostles after Pentecost a fearless evangelist for Christ, his God.

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