

Reading: John 20:19-31

Theme: Have No DOUBT Thomas!

Probably we have all heard the comment about a glass being half empty or half full and how we view it may indicate whether we are a pessimist or an optimist! This evening we will look at someone who was a real pessimist; who saw things as grey, dark grey, but mostly black, yet in a sense he was a man for our time as he wanted hard and real evidence that things were as others said. To him, seeing was believing and he would not take anyone's word - even of close friends - that things were actually as they said they were. He had to test, question, check things out for himself before he would accept as true what was said. I am going to speak on Thomas, often known as "Doubting Thomas". He was a hard-nosed pragmatist and seemed to be given to always viewing the dark side of life. This did not change after the traumatic events that he had witnessed; he had been part of that first Easter weekend.

He was one of Jesus' 12 disciples, had the honour, privilege of seeing the Lord Jesus' life and hearing His ministry, in fact he had been an eyewitness to the miracles Jesus had done, had heard the amazing teaching of Jesus. Incredibly he had even told others of God and carried out miracles himself.

He experienced all the sad, confusing, tragic and gut-wrenching events of the previous days - which possibly made him even more cynical, pessimistic and questioning. Sad and tragic events can do that in our lives and leave us not only traumatised, but questioning, cynical, bitter, resentful, hard-nosed and even with an inclination to think that everything will or has gone wrong. Because of that we can put hard shells around our lives, not let anyone close to us so that people and things, especially religious things, will not get to us.

Thomas, along with the other disciples, had been with Jesus on the Passover night in the upper room, then in the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was captured, then he and his friends ran away and abandoned Jesus. I expect he heard reports of Jesus' trial; of Him being condemned - even though innocent of the charges; then of His execution on the Roman cross, His dying and being buried. Probably he too had spent a miserable few days with the other disciples as they grieved the death of the One that they expected so much from. It is likely the disciples had been afraid the Jewish leaders would get and deal with them too. Thomas would probably have felt this intensely.

On that first Easter Sunday morning there must have been confused feelings as news, talk of an empty tomb, of angels being seen, of Jesus having been seen alive... Sometime Thomas headed out and away from them, wasn't staying there with them – he may legitimately had things to attend to or couldn't cope with things. That really was a shame, because if he had hung about, stayed there, he would have encountered the risen Lord Jesus that evening as He appeared to the disciples gathered in the upper room and Thomas would have seen how Jesus demonstrated He really was alive, had defeated and conquered death. He would not have remained low and in grief.

What joy and excitement the other 10 disciples knew that evening, there was a real buzz, a real excitement among them and when they met up with Thomas again, they told him *"We have seen the Lord!"* They probably told him a lot more than that, but that was their initial summary. All they had seen and heard was probably told to Thomas with excited words and a sense of joy. In contrast to their joy and excitement, Thomas said in effect *"Rubbish, you are lying, it's a windup, a cruel joke and you're trying to trick me."*

What he actually said was can be read at the end of v25 *"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."*

Many people are like that in our day and age; perhaps someone watching or listening is like that and you need to have hard evidence, you need to see, in fact you would demand of God *"Come on show me, prove it to me that You exist, are real, that the things of Christianity are true."* Many have said such, but did not really mean it, because as God started to show things to them, they found other excuses not to believe! Thomas **meant** said what he said! He had doubts and he is called Doubting Thomas. I want to use the word DOUBT to hang my headings from:

Decide.

Thomas would have been at home in our age - as he had to see to believe. He had made his mind up; decided this could not be true. As nice a thought, or notion as it was, he decided this was false, a lie, untrue and it just couldn't be. Perhaps you have decided the same about Christianity and all that it teaches about this Jesus and your mind is made up that it cannot be true, maybe you are doing so to allow **yourself** to live as **you** would want to live! Thomas felt, decided, came to the conclusion that a person could not come back from the dead. As far as that goes we would agree with him. Yet Thomas had seen such things happen with his own eyes – he personally witnessed Jesus raising people from the dead - whether they were freshly dead or had been dead 4 days and starting to decay and stink, but on this occasion, he felt, said and decided that it could not be the case because the One who could raise people from the dead was Himself dead!

You may feel that Jesus cannot be alive and because of that Christianity cannot be true; a dead Jesus cannot change people's

lives and yet you ignore, maybe deliberately forget the evidence around you of changed lives of Christians you know, of history showing lives changed and Jesus' effect on changing history, nations, even on our own land. You have decided "*No, it is not for me and so it cannot be true!*" Like Thomas you can:

Observe.

That week Thomas observed, saw his friends and the change in them. Perhaps he felt they were deluded, or were carrying on the windup, the sick joke at his expense, but he probably had to acknowledge that they were different, remarkably different and they had changed. I wonder if he had doubts about his decision and even wondered deep down whether they were telling the truth. A change had come upon them, they were different and he couldn't explain it, but it all seemed to have come about due to the claim they had made about seeing and meeting the risen Lord Jesus!

You may have observed, seen and known people you know and they may have spoken to you about Jesus, might have brought or invited you to church. It may be that deep down you are curious as to what has brought about the changes in their lives. Perhaps you have heard about the Lord Jesus many times and the need to have faith in Him, also the changes He will make in your life. Yet you may be trying to go your own way, do as all your friends do - for you do not want to be the odd one out; but as you observe, see the Christians you know, you realise there is something in their lives that attracts you, causes you to want to have what they have, or at least to know more about it. It could be that you feel it's a phase, a fad in their life, but you have to acknowledge they are different and they tell you of Jesus and how He's affected their lives and here you are listening to, watching a message, perhaps checking things out, also observing what goes on here. Perhaps like Thomas you are beginning to:

Understand.

Thomas was told of the risen Jesus, probably had been told of the two who returned from Emmaus who had burst in and told them they had met the risen Lord Jesus. No doubt they shared how He showed the 2 of them from the OT that the Christ really did have to suffer and enter into His glory. Now the other disciples would talk of what the Scriptures said, perhaps Thomas was beginning to understand the word of God said such things and it sort of made sense, yet he kept to his decision not to believe unless... He needed to see those things were true for himself and not have a piggyback faith - riding along on the faith of friends or family.

You may have heard the Bible taught here or elsewhere; you might have heard such from your earliest days. You may understand a bit or a lot of what you learned and have begun to recognise and understand something of who Jesus is and who He claims to be from the Bible. Perhaps you are trying to ignore His claims on your own life, or maybe you think it is OK to piggyback on someone else's faith, feelings or experiences. I urge you not to do that, but to make sure **you** really and truly sort these matters out for **yourself** and come to know that the Lord Jesus is alive and that He is your Saviour. You, like Thomas, have to:

Believe.

A week after Jesus' first appearing to the disciples, they were again together in the house and Thomas is there. Jesus appears once more; He proclaims peace and then addresses a totally shocked Thomas directly in v27 *'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."*' I wonder how Thomas felt as Jesus confronted him at his point of doubt, questions, fear and

unbelief. It seems Jesus knew all about Thomas and what was in his mind and heart.

We are to realise that the Lord Jesus knows about our doubts, questions, fears and unbelief. He knows those things this very moment and knows whether they are true questions or smokescreens and excuses! We are to realise that Christ and Christianity do not discourage honest questions, doubts etc. Such are welcome. It does not mean **we** can answer them all, but **God can** and He can answer you in surprising ways. Thomas with all his doubts and fears must have been really shocked and surprised when the Lord Jesus challenged him on the very things he had said. Are you prepared for God to answer your questions etc? He can answer them in ways that can not only surprise you, but shock, maybe even alarm you!

Thomas' bold statement was answered and his unbelief was challenged. We are not told whether Thomas acted on what Jesus had said to him... The risen Jesus also said to Thomas *"Stop doubting and believe."* Thomas was being told that it was not enough to have questions, fears and the like dealt with; doubt – decided, determined doubt has to be abandoned and replaced by belief. You can have all your questions answered, have no more arguments or reasons against Christ and Christianity, but you have to move from doubt to belief, for you cannot then sit on the fence. You need to believe in and on the Lord Jesus as your own Saviour. That is the challenge of belief - not only to know **of** Jesus, what is taught and said about Him, but to personally **know Him** as your own Saviour and Lord. Thomas did that, for we see:

Trust.

Now Thomas believed Jesus was alive, no more doubts, but it was more than an intellectual response and acceptance, more than a

head knowledge, but he trusted in Jesus totally from his innermost being and life. He showed this by his confession of faith as he says to Jesus *"My Lord and my God!"* For a Jew that was a huge thing to say. We could allowably translate it as *"My Jehovah, Yahweh and my Adonai!"* Thomas was owning Jesus as totally and fully God - that the One who was standing there before him with wounds in His hands and side, with a real body was fully God and yet remarkably also fully man who had died, had defeated death and had risen again. His words showed that he fully and totally trusted Jesus as his only God and therefore Saviour.

Each one of us needs to trust this same risen Jesus as our own Saviour. We need to realise not only who He is and what He has done, but that He did it personally for us as an individual and we have to trust His person and work to make us personally right with God and get us safely to heaven. Yet there are many other benefits along with this salvation in our lives now, as well as for eternity.

Yes, we need to trust this One, but unlike Thomas we will not see Him on earth as he did. Incredibly it seems we will be more blessed if we trust Jesus v29 *"Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."'* Thomas had seen and believed, we who have not seen Him physically with our own eyes are pronounced as blessed when we trust Jesus as our Saviour. We too will one day see Jesus in all His glory and beauty!

The faith we have is unlike Thomas' faith – he saw, heard, was present with Jesus, may have put his finger and hand in Jesus' actual crucifixion wounds. We cannot and do not have to do that. We, though we do not see Him, we believe and trust what it written in God's word as real and true and we too are blessed with salvation, eternal life, for we are those who have believed in Jesus

through the disciples' message and Jesus has already prayed for us to behold His glory and be with Him in heaven (17: 20 & 24).

Peter writing to scattered believers, mostly Gentiles, and he says in 1 Peter 1v8-9 *"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."* Peter then went on to write of OT prophets who wrote of such things, but they didn't fully see or grasp such, even that angels long to look into such things. Yet we who trust in the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour, we are blessed by being saved, have eternal life and a secure home in heaven. We are in many ways more favoured than the OT prophets, even than those alive in Jesus' time as we have a far fuller account and knowledge of such things through God's word and the work, the enlightening of the Holy Spirit as we read God's word and have these things made known to us as we read, hear and think about God's word.

This evening can I urge us all to make sure that we have this real, sincere blessing from Jesus by trusting Him as our Saviour. May Jesus' words to Thomas be His words to us personally *"Stop doubting and believe."* We are to obey the command, the instruction Jesus gave to Thomas and trust this risen and ever living Saviour as our own Saviour - then we will know the new life He gives us, His help and company as we go through life and one day we will be with Him in heaven and delight in praising the One who was dead and is alive forever more.