

John 20:24-31: Thomas and the Resurrected Christ

OUTLINE

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INTRODUCTION

There are at least 11 recorded accounts of Jesus appearing to people after His resurrection during the 40 days before He ascended into heaven. First, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, John 20:11-18; second He appeared to the other women, Matthew 28:9-10; third He appeared to the disciples on the Emmaus Road Luke 24:13-31; then to Peter by himself Luke 24:34, 1 Cor. 15:5; and then to the ten apostles minus Thomas John 20:19-25. These were all the appearances on that first resurrection Sunday. But there are others one week later Jesus appeared in the passage we are considering today to the 11 apostles including Thomas; on the shores of the Sea of Galilee where Peter is restored, John 21; Jesus appeared to the 11 on a mountain in Galilee to give the Great Commission, Matt. 28:16-20; Paul reveals that Jesus also appeared to 500 of His disciples at one time, 1 Cor. 15:6; and then also to His own half-brother James, 1 Cor. 15:7, and finally at the Ascension, Luke 24:50-51, Acts 1:4-11. But there are post-Ascension appearances where Jesus appears to Paul on the Damascus road; Stephen while he is being stoned; even John in the book of Revelation.

Today we come to consider Jesus appearance to Thomas. This is a favorite story when dealing with matters of unbelief; but the significance of Thomas encountering the risen Lord is so much more significant than merely satisfying the doubts of one doubter. John has written his gospel he tells us in 20:31-32, is to establish the identity of Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God, and that by believing in Him we might have life in His name. The whole gospel of John which began by talking about the Word who was a person who was with God, and who was God, and who became flesh to bring light into darkness, life for our death and grace for our sins; then went on to show by various signs, and the various I Am sayings, culminating in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that He is the Savior, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world, and that by believing in Him we can have eternal life. The story of Thomas is a climactic embodiment of the purpose of John's gospel. As we dig into the importance of the resurrection through Jesus encounter with Thomas we will explore this portion under five headings: Problem; peace; praise; promise; purpose. The problem of unbelief; the peace which results from the resurrection; the praise of Thomas's confession; the promise to those who believe without seeing; and the purpose of John's gospel.

Problem

V24, 'Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.' John's gospel is the only gospel which gives us any details about the apostle Thomas, and it is not a lot. We are told that he is one of the 12. His name is Thomas which is an Aramaic term for Twin and is name that comes from the practice where one of the twins is named and the other is called

'twin'/Thomas. You will remember that things were coming to a head between Jesus and the Jews, they wanted to stone Him. Lazarus had just died and Jesus sought to go and 'wake him up.' The disciples tried to dissuade Him due to the threat of death but He insisted. It is at this point that Thomas speaks up, 11:16, 'So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." This has led him to having a reputation for being loyal as he is willing to go and to motivate others to go too; but also a pessimist. The second famous exchange was when Jesus was talking about His departure in the Upper Room, and Jesus said, 14:4-6, 'And you know the way to where I am going.' ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' Thomas we can see is honest and not scared to let his own ignorance show in order to ask a question. I imagine that the other disciples were relieved he asked because they wanted to.

Our portion has the third exchange. Here we see that Thomas had not been present a week earlier on resurrection Sunday when Jesus had risen from the dead and appeared to His disciples, 20:19-23. We don't know why, we are not given the reason, but in God's providence we can be grateful because of what unfolds. V25, 'So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." The disciples were doing their job well, they were testifying and bearing witness to the resurrection. The disciples had obviously been talking about Jesus who had resurrected and had shown them His hands and side, v20. But Thomas did not believe. He had every reason to, he knew these men would not lie having lived with them for 3 ½ years; Jesus had hinted at His resurrection in various ways; the multiple testimonies from the disciples and the women. Some have tried to turn Thomas into a 21st century modern evidentialist who deliberately works out his beliefs by a verificationist epistemology. This cannot be; Thomas is not an unbeliever. He is saved; he is one of the 11 who were elect not like Judas. He had preached Jesus as the Messiah, He saw Jesus resurrect Lazarus from the dead only weeks ago, and even performed miracles himself. His honest doubt where he outspokenly stressed his doubts is present. His statements about wanting to place his fingers and hand inside the wounds; and the language of 'I will never believe,' are quite extreme and emphatic. Some have suggested that Thomas thinks the other 11 have seen a ghost and he wants to prove the physical quality of Jesus body before He will agree that He is resurrected.

As a believer Thomas had every reason to believe, whether it was the words of Christ; the promises of scripture, the testimony of multiple eye witnesses, the many signs Jesus had performed; to reduce faith to my ability to verify is to make our own wisdom and intellect higher than the word of God, the words of Jesus, even the legal requirement to verify something as true in a court of law by multiple eye witnesses. This is an unreasonable demand that makes all of reality ransom to my ability to verify it. We must pick on Thomas here, not because he is wrong in ways we aren't, but because he is embodying the high handed nature of our unbelief where we exalt ourselves to the place of the arbiter of truth. We must expose this because when we look at the unbelieving attitude that is prevailing today and hear people pleading their reasonable unbelief. Thomas's words are thought to be the test of any rational person. The truth is that no one lived their lives by a purist verification way of thinking. We believe Julius Caesar exists because of historical testimony. The resurrection of Jesus is one of the

best attested events in ancient history. We have multiple eye witness accounts from various sources that all agree on the details. More than that this event was also prophesied and came to pass beyond any self-fulfilling attempts a charlatan could hope to manufacture. Thomas's unbelief in the face of the testimonies of the other apostles was wrong not reasonable.

Peace

V26, 'Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Eight days is an inclusive counting method for saying a week later. In other words, on the next Sunday, the first day of the week, not the seventh, Jesus appeared again. The significance of the eighth day pointing to the new creation; and the significance of the first day symbolizing entering into God's Sabbath rest through the finished work of Christ has led the church to see a shift from the seventh day to the first day. So much so that it came to be called the Lord's Day. Our obedience to the moral law of the 10 commandments no longer consists in observing a Saturday in a ceremonial way but by going to church on Sunday and setting that one day in seven apart for spiritual pursuits and rest. Once again the disciples are locked inside for fear of the authorities, but look Thomas is now with the other disciples. And again Jesus miraculously appeared among them inside a locked room. And we hear some of the greatest words ever spoken, 'Peace be with you.'

If the words we can write over Good Friday are 'it is finished,' then the words we have write over Resurrection Sunday are 'Peace be with you.' The first time Jesus appeared to His disciples He said the same words, v19. This peace is in fulfillment of the promise Jesus gave in the Upper Room, 14:27, 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.' 16:33, 'I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.'" But the peace announced here is more than just the emotion of calm in the midst of a storm. This is the announcement of a new state of affairs between God and sinful humanity. Because Jesus has been our sin bearer, because He has once and for all paid for our sins. The wrath of God that was due to our sins is satisfied, it is paid in full. The words 'it is finished' signaled that Jesus had fulfilled His role as the suffering servant. He had submitted to the positive demands of the law in living a perfect life; and to the punitive demands of the law in offering His perfect life as a sacrifice of payment, as a ransom to gain our release, as a propitiation to satisfy God's holy wrath against our sins. Jesus was resurrected on Sunday because sin had been paid in full. He arose as a firstfruits of a new era that had begun where new creation life was now present and available to all who believed in Him. He arose from the dead as a sign that death and sin and this age now had a due date because they had been defeated. The in breaking of new creation realities is announced in this one word 'peace.'

Praise

V27-28, 'Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus demonstrates His omniscience by showing that He is aware of the words that Thomas spoke about touching His wounds. He offers for him to touch Him. There is a firmness in

Christ's words as He adds the rebuke, 'Do not disbelieve, but believe.' In fact the saying is stronger than that it is more like 'Do not be an unbeliever but a believer.' We are not told whether Thomas actually touched Jesus wounds or not, it appears he did not. You can only imagine what he must have felt, that familiar face, that familiar voice, the look in those eyes; and the wounds standing there to be seen; wounds suffered for him; wounds that spoke of a true death and yet here He was resurrected from the dead. Thomas redeems himself with his praise filled confession, giving us one of the clearest and purest confessions of the identity of Jesus Christ. We must appreciate that John has cherry picked Thomas's experience and placed it here in this promise position to emphasize just this. The gospel began with the Word who was with God and was God who came into the world but the world did not receive Him. He became flesh that we may have light and life and be saved through believing in Him. The gospel records those who believed and those who did not, the question of His identity being affirmed by the signs and the sayings and yet being denied by those who should have believed in Him. When we ask the question who is Jesus and read John's gospel to find the answer, here is an experience recorded that we might see how we should respond, in faith and worship.

Today you will hear the sceptics saying that Jesus nowhere claimed to be God. This is ridiculous, He called Himself 'I Am' the OT designation for YHWH; He claimed to be equal in work and honor to the Father; having divine functions of forgiving sins and judging sinners; He claimed an eternal nature having predated His incarnation and come down from heaven; and an eternal destiny in returning to the glory that He had with the Father before the world began. But here we also see that as Thomas worships Him He does not rebuff it, He does not rebuke Thomas for his idolatry as He has just done his unbelief. Who is Jesus? He is Lord and God. That word Lord could merely be a way of addressing someone with respect, but in light of the OT way of calling YHWH Lord; with the expectations of a Davidic King who will rule over all; with the promises that those who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved, we can see it means much more. And paired with the obvious claim that Jesus is God, there can be no equivocation. This is a high confession of worship and faith in Jesus Christ as God and Savior.

Promise

V29, 'Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.' No doubt when we read these amazing first hand encounters with the resurrected Christ our own hearts long to have been there, to have seen with our own eyes, and heard with our own ears, and touched with our own hands. But here is the truth, we can know the full blessings of salvation despite never having seen Him, but having come to faith through hearing. Jesus here is anticipating His own ascension when He will be taken up into heaven, and the way in which the world will come to be saved will not be by seeing Him first hand; but by hearing the testimony of the eye witnesses and the message that is handed down through them. The very same message the Holy Spirit has accurately recorded for us in the Scriptures. John's gospel only has two beatitude sayings, this one and John 13:17 where He says blessed are those who are doers and imitate the example He gives when He washed the disciple's feet. Jesus promises blessing, the blessing of salvation to all those who hear the truth about Jesus and believe. The blessing of sins forgiven; the blessing of those who have been alienated from God becoming children of God and restored to fellowship with Him; the blessing of the Holy

Spirit leading us in paths of holiness, helping us put sin to death and produce holiness; the blessing of a guaranteed future where we will be resurrected, no death, no sin, no devil, no fallen creation. And included in this blessing is the promise of one day seeing Him anyway, face to face.

Purpose

V30-31, 'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.' This climactic story of Thomas's faith and confession of Jesus identity and Jesus promise of blessing for all who believe are the perfect segue for John to spell out the purpose for his writing and why he cherry picked all the things that he did in his gospel. John makes clear that he could have retold many things that Jesus did which act as signs to confirm who He is. The 7 main signs of John's gospel are capped with the great sign of Jesus taking His life again and rising from the dead. John has written enough so that we can all do two things. Firstly, that we can see that Jesus is indeed the Christ, that the signs authenticate what He said about Himself that He is the Jewish Messiah, but not only that. He is also the Son of God, the second person of the Godhead, one who is worthy of praise as Thomas has just demonstrated. Secondly, by believing that Jesus is sent of God, to be the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world; that He is the bread of life; the light of the world; the gate; the good shepherd that lays down His life for the sheep; the resurrection and life; the way, the truth and the life; and the vine in whom we live. That by acknowledging who He is and looking to Him for salvation, by believing in Him we can have eternal life.

Here is my closing challenge for us on this resurrection Sunday. Do you believe? The resurrection is the great miracle which underlines that Jesus is who He said He is. He is Lord and God, this is confirmed by Thomas for us today. Are you wrongly holding back and not accepting Him as Lord and Saviour? Are you wrongly demanding that Jesus satisfy your intellectual demands? Are you refusing to see that Jesus identity and His work for us is confirmed by many eye witnesses and we have every reason to believe and be saved? If you do believe then today on this resurrection Sunday, like Thomas worship Him, give your all to Him, speak of Him to others.