

Sunday 23rd April 2017 Jesus and Thomas

Jesus Appears to His Disciples John 20 verses 19-29

Thomas: The Background

Thomas was one of the twelve apostles called out by Jesus (**Matthew 10 v 3**). His Greek name was Didymus meaning like Thomas; a twin. The Hebrew word for this is 'ta'om' meaning a twin.

Thomas is described or has been labelled as 'Doubting Thomas' because he refused to believe the disciples when they reported they had seen Jesus (**John 20 vs 24-25**). He is then confronted by Jesus eight days later and believes (**John 20 vs 26-29**). Unfortunately Thomas has been labelled as the 'Doubter' in Church history that often it has been forgotten that Thomas was often the one brave enough to ask the questions others were thinking. To think that Thomas was the only one who doubted is a limited picture of this follower of Christ.

Jesus seems to appear the same day to His disciples but Thomas was not there. Eight days later He comes again. This time Thomas was there. Jesus had told the disciples to head up to Galilee; He had told the women that. We are not sure why the delay. We can only conclude that it was about coming to terms with their own fear and the change of events.

The Resurrection is a miracle and people have encounters with Jesus that are real.

How did Thomas feel that he was not there the first time Jesus had appeared to the disciples and Jesus had given them a new commission? Did he feel left out of the rejoicing? Did He feel that he missed out on God's blessing? Did he feel jealous? His doubting might be genuine and an honest appraisal or it might be seen as a reaction that he had missed out on the first appearing of Jesus.

Whatever the answers, one thing is certain-***Thomas did not want to believe Jesus had risen from the dead just because others had said so.***

Application

- ***How do we react to other's experience of Jesus?*** Do we get jealous, doubtful or are we inspired to want to know Jesus more in our lives?
- ***It is important that none of us have our faith and relationship with Jesus second hand.*** He wants to make a personal relationship with us all, one that is not bound or determined by others or by our parent's example.
- ***We can know about God but we need to experience God for ourselves and this is what Thomas was seeking- We need this experience of Him in our lives*** not only once but every day in our lives. If I was to ask you how has Jesus been speaking and working in your life this week, would you be able to share something? If willing?

Jesus' resurrection was a miracle. It was an event that has changed the world. Miracles are 'played down' these days. In fact anything supernatural is played down and explained away.

The Church which bears Jesus' name has not always 'done Him proud'. People have lied or exaggerated that miracles have occurred and when it is found out Christians are seen as charlatans.

The psychology of our day can give us some logical explanations that miracles do not exist. We also live in a part of the world that does not report the miraculous, it has never been in people's experiences and therefore the assumption can be made that miracles do not happen. Just because they do not happen in our lives or we have never seen one does not mean they do not happen. It can be seen as both ignorant and arrogant to think this.

Miracles happen every day. The fact that we can talk to a living Jesus and we can read His word and it speaks to us by the Holy Spirit is a miracle in itself.

We hear of miracles happening in other parts of the world, often in situations where there is no more that people can do. God breaks through by the power of the Holy Spirit more often than not when we have come to the end of our resources and we are not self-dependant. Our faith as Christians is based on the miraculous. Let us not play down His power in our lives and the world today.

Thomas Doubts the story reported to him

Thomas could not believe Jesus was alive and had risen back from the dead. He says that he wants physical proof.

We can underestimate the effect that the shock, confusion, grief and disappointment may have had on the disciples. It may have been a block for him to see what had really happened.

All the disciples knew He had died, they all, in their own way doubted he would come back. They doubted the women who had reported the empty tomb. They were lost and afraid. ***So it was not unusual for Thomas to have doubts.***

However, **it was also important that Thomas knew for himself what had happened. He wanted an encounter with Jesus himself.**

There is no other evidence to suggest that Thomas made a habit of doubting. The scraps of evidence in scripture we do have seem to suggest an enthusiastic commitment to Jesus but also an enquiring mind to get to the truth; he was a thinker.

Thomas asks Jesus, after he tells the disciples that He is going away, where He was going (**John 14 v 5**). This question resulted in Jesus making a revelatory statement about Himself, that He was the way, the truth and the life (**John 14v6**). Thomas's questioning caused the disciples to have a new understanding of who Jesus was.

Application

- **About DOUBT-There is nothing wrong with asking questions and also with doubt as long as we do not stay there.** James warns us that doubting causes us to change and toss around like the wind and it is not a secure place to be (**James 1 v 6**). However, God wants us to dialogue with Him about our doubts, questions and fears. Some questions get us nowhere but others take us to the light. There are **tunnel questions**- those which take us somewhere and **cave questions**- which take us nowhere). **Doubt takes us nowhere if we do not use it as a stepping stone to more revelation.** One man once said to Jesus, 'I believe, help my unbelief.'. **Thomas was a genuine questioner.** We know this because in **John 14** his

questions bring further revelation; Jesus declares He was the way the truth and the life (John 14 v 7)

- **There is hope in the midst of our anguish and despair.** Jesus comes by the Holy Spirit today to bring His calming presence to our despair and confusion.
- **Confusion, despair, hopelessness and shock to rejoicing.** *'After every Good Friday and awkward Saturday there is always a resurrection day'*. There is hope beyond what we experience whether this is for a short or long time.

Thomas has revelation and this effects his life forever:

Thomas is the only disciple who declared that Jesus was God (John 20 v 28) and the only disciple who willingly said he would die for Jesus (John 11vs 7-8)

Jesus specifically asks Thomas to touch Him answering his remark to the others before. Jesus meets people exactly where they are at with Him. Jesus focuses on Thomas' request and offers him what he has asked for.

However, there is no evidence in the text that Thomas actually touches Jesus- He did not have to do so. He then declares one of the most incredible declarations of Jesus in the New Testament, **'My Lord and My God.'** 'LORD' in the Greek here means –Kyrios and GOD here means Theos; He is declaring Jesus is God. This is one of the strongest texts for the divinity of Christ. This was a declaration of worship and not just astonishment. Jesus receives this worship, perhaps openly for the first time from others.

The Legacy of Thomas. This included:

- **John & Thomas:** It is interesting to note that gospel references to Thomas are mainly in the gospel of John, apart from the apostolic listings in the other accounts. It has led some scholars to believe that Thomas may have been a close friend of John's.
- **There are two gospels attributed to Thomas.** Scholars are undivided whether this was actually Thomas, the Apostle's work or a Thomas school of teaching. They not included in the canon of scripture. The later one does not appear to contradict the earlier gospel accounts but expands it. The dating of the gospel is also much later- AD 90+ hence the conclusion about Thomas not being its direct author and therefore not being included in the canon.
- **His Journeyings & Martyrdom:** Church tradition records Thomas travelling to Parthia and Persia (modern day Iraq/Iran). India has been named as a place which Thomas visited and was perhaps martyred by burning. This is believed to be a place called St. Thomas' Mount, near Madras. Some traditions have him travelling at one time as far as China. Some scholars believed that there was possibly a Thomas school of disciples who later took the gospel to China. There are some archaeological remains which suggest an early Christian witness in China related to Thomas or his followers in the first century. There are Indian communities today that can trace their Christian heritage back to Thomas.

Application

- Have you had a revelation of Jesus in your life? In the past and now? How has it effected your life and how does it affect your life each day?

- Jesus in our lives is not a 'one-off' it is a journey in relationship with a person. How is your journey going?
- Jesus is revealing Himself to people all the time and not only in history.

What is Real Faith?

After this Jesus says, **'Blessed are those who have believed but have not seen.'** (John 20 v 29).

Hebrews 11 v 1 tells us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. Believing is about not seeing. We can see with our physical or spiritual eyes. The latter have to be opened by the Spirit of God. The man born blind that was healed by Jesus is a demonstration of this (John 9).

Hebrews 11 v 6 tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God. It is God who gives us faith in the first place. This is true biblical faith that pleases God, who believes Him without having to see.

This argument has long been used by the world as a reason why we should not believe- that we cannot physically prove God exists. The world asks for scientific or intellectual discovery, for an answer to this question. People say, 'if I could touch God and see Him I would believe.' There were people in Jesus' day who saw Him do things and yet did not believe.

1 Peter 1 verses 8-9 Peter says, **'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 of glorious joy, for you are receiving the end joy of your faith, the salvation of your souls.'**

'We can't know God or what He has prepared for us through our natural senses but we can know Him through the revelation that His Spirit brings us. We can see through the Spirit's, illumination.' Dave Smith in 'Transformed Life.' (pages 68-70).

Paul in his first prayer in Ephesians (Ephesians 1 verses 17-19) asks God that they would have a revelation and be enlightened. That only comes from the Spirit of God.

Summary

Our encounter with Jesus is not just about knowing the facts of the faith, it is about a personal encounter. We can, like the Devil, believe what Jesus came to do and why but if this does not impact us personally in our hearts, our 'faith' remains a head knowledge and not a faith at all. God desires to encounter us each and every day. This is miraculous in itself. In the Hebrew mind set, to have knowledge was to have it personally revealed. You are not seen as knowledgeable unless there is a personal revelation of that knowledge and that it is not just theory.

Tony McKeowen writes, **'It's not more knowledge we need but more revelation of the knowledge we have..... Personal revelation is not opinion but a conviction. It is a divine intervention at the heart of the matter.'** ('Personal Revelation' in Wise Choices, Promise Keepers, February 2017.