

Thomas

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[0 : 00] Well, as most of you will know, we've been looking in the morning services since April at nine different characters who are those whom our Lord, in the course of the New Testament, has addressed or called by name.

There are comparatively few whom the Lord actually addresses by name. And as we've mentioned in previous weeks, we did discover a couple of extra ones that we haven't perhaps caught on. But we come this morning to the final one of those called or addressed by name by Jesus in the New Testament, and that is, of course, Thomas.

And we find this at verse 29. Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

Thomas is one of those characters with whom probably one has an instinctive affection or a sense of identity here, because it's quite understandable.

[1 : 01] Although sometimes some commentators criticize him for his position here in chapter 20, it's quite understandable that he should simply want what the other disciples have already received.

He is inclined to think that they are perhaps just collectively deceived. They've allowed their desire for what they want to believe to cloud their actual judgment.

And time and time again, we find that both in the New Testament and also in the Old, as we'll see to an extent this evening as well in Exodus, that if the Bible, the New Testament audio, was being written simply by people who wanted to produce some kind of politicized manifesto, that they wanted to present a sort of propaganda imagery that everybody would just subscribe to and sign up to blindly, then they wouldn't include the kind of warts and all defects which are included so much through the biblical narrative.

The followers of the Lord, both in the Old Testament and the New, are seen to be, you not filled with imperfections and doubts and at times denials.

And what we find amongst the disciples, if not only their inability to comprehend what Jesus is actually talking about through much of his ministry, because it's held, it's kept back from them, but also the disbelief of the disciples at the time of his resurrection.

[2 : 33] Jesus himself is, of course, gentle with Thomas, as we see in the narrative that we read. But in Mark's account, of course, we see again how the disciples collectively are disinclined to believe, though so themselves, being witnesses of Christ's resurrection.

We see in Mark, in chapter 16, just read briefly. And when Jesus was risen early, the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, of course, with whom we began this series of those called by name.

Indeed, we began in the very chapter that we're now ending with in John 20. He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he cast seven devils. She went and told them that he'd been with him, as they mourned and wept.

And they, when they had heard that he was alive and had been seen of her, believed not. That's what Mark tells us. They believed not. After that, he appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country.

And they went and told it unto the residue. Neither believed they them. Afterward, he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at me and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.

[3 : 47] So you could say that perhaps, you know, Jesus is rebuking Thomas here. He says, don't be faithless, but believe him. But there is all the difference in the world between those who are simply denying and saying, no, of course he didn't rise from the dead.

That's nonsense. I don't believe a word of it. And those who, like Thomas here, whose hearts are breaking with love for all that they have endured with Jesus and witnessed all his sufferings and death, and who live in dread of making a mistake in something so vital.

They live in dread of having their hopes raised only to be dashed again. They have had taken from them the most precious person that ever walked the earth, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He's been taken away from them. He's been crucified. They've all seen it. They all know how they behaved in the garden that night, how they all forsook him and fled. None of them has got anything to be proud of.

They're all a bit ashamed. They don't dare believe now that he has risen from the dead, and yet the disciples see him here. Except Thomas is not there.

[5 : 04] Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didamus, was not with them when Jesus came. But, of course, then Jesus makes this additional appearance, and the implication, eight days later, counting the first day, which was the first day of the week, and then the seven days following, so that's eight days.

Again, he's appearing on the first day of the week. He's appearing on the Lord's Day again to the disciples. And, humanly speaking, I think we could take it. He is making this appearance especially for Thomas.

After eight days again, his disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then said he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands.

And reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

This is a disciple who only longs for Jesus to be there. Longs for him to be real. Longs for him to be risen. It's not unlike the doubt, you might say, or the disbelief that Nathaniel showed right at the beginning of John's account of the gospel.

[6 : 22] When Philip goes and finds Nathaniel. And he says, You know, we've found the Messiah. We have found him of whom Moses and the law and the prophets did write. Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

And Nathaniel said unto him, I'm trying not any good thing. Come out of Nazareth. Philip said unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to him and said to him, Behold the Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.

Why doesn't he say, Oh, Nathaniel, why did you doubt? No, wherefore didst thou doubt? Oh, ye of little faith. He doesn't rebuke him. He doesn't say, Oh, imagine you casting aspersions on my hometown of Nazareth.

How dare you? He doesn't give him any kind of rebuke or any kind of put down. He just says, You're the smart guy that isn't going to be taken in by just anything. He is an Israelite indeed.

One who really longs for the Messiah of Israel. One who waits for him. One who prays and meditates and longs for him. But who doesn't dare to hope unless he can be sure.

[7 : 23] An Israelite indeed. In whom there is no guile. He pays him a compliment. And Nathaniel, of course, right then and there says, You're the son of God. You're the king of Israel.

So he's ready with his professional faith as soon as he knows that Jesus knows him. And Thomas, of course, discovers again here that Jesus knows him well and truly.

The implication from what we read in John 20 here is that Jesus has not appeared in the intervening week to any of the disciples.

He appears several times on that first day, the day of his resurrection. And then he appears this eight days later again, the Lord's Day, a week later. But the implication is he doesn't appear to anyone in the meantime.

So in other words, there's no occasion for Jesus to appear and chat to Peter or Andrew or Matthew or any of the others and say, Do you know what Thomas said? He had the cheek to say. He wouldn't believe unless he put his hand into the print of the nails and so on.

[8 : 23] Nobody has told Jesus. Nobody has gone and whispered in his ear. He knows. He knows because he is God. He hears everything that they say and everything that Thomas says.

He knows above all, not only what was on Thomas' lips, but what was in his heart. And so the first person he addresses after he has said, Peace be with you, is Thomas.

Reach other thy finger. Behold my hands. Reach other thy hand. Trust it into my hand. Here's the proof. He wanted the proof. Thomas, it really is me. See, touch, handle me.

As he says to them in Luke 24. A spirit hath not flesh and bones as he seen he have. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Does he go and say, Well, just a minute, Jesus. That's okay. Fair enough. That is a nail print. Right enough. Yeah, that looks like a spear thrust on the side. Okay. I suppose it is enough. I don't know. As soon as he sees Jesus, he knows it's really him.

[9 : 24] My Lord and my God. He was ready to die with Jesus. Remember in John 11, when all the other disciples, when he was going to go and see Lazarus, and the other disciples said, The Jews were going to stone you very recently.

And Thomas says, Oh, come on. If he's determined to go, let us go that we may die with him. He's ready to die with Jesus. He just can't bear to live without Jesus.

And he doesn't want anybody artificially raising his hopes. This too is an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile. Now, in all those things, in John's account of the Gospel, he is described as, several times, as Thomas called Didymus.

Verse 24, for example. And there, Didymus is the Greek that means twin. But, of course, the name Thomas, as well, is thought to be an Aramaic word, which also means twin.

So, what it's really saying in verse 24 is the twin, who's called the twin. But, in other words, it's saying in two different languages. Because, remember, the New Testament is written in Greek, not in the Aramaic or Syriac language that Jesus and the disciples would have actually spoken in Galilee and in Judea at the time.

[10 : 42] So, the spoken local dialect is not the language in which the New Testament is written. So, for those who are reading the Greek, what John is saying is, look, his name actually means twin, which is what Thomas does mean.

It's an Aramaic word that means twin. So, almost certainly, almost certainly, it's not a proper name, or it wasn't originally a proper name, but rather a nickname.

A name by which Thomas was identified amongst all the other disciples. It's some apocryphal writings, you know, non-scriptural writings, bits of legend or traditions, have his name done as Judas Thomas, or Judah Thomas.

Now, as we've looked up and looked at Judas Iscariot, of course, the name Judas, or Judah, or Jude, was extremely common in Palestine and amongst the Jewish people.

It is the name of the founder of their tribe. Of course, everybody, a lot of people are going to be called Jude, or Judah, or Judas. But there's already at least two other Judases amongst the disciples.

[11 : 51] You can't really have three without distinguishing them in some way. And if somebody is a twin, then it's the easy thing to just identify them as, oh yeah, the twin, Judas, the twin, if he was called Judas, or just call him the twin, Thomas.

Or Didymus in the Greek. But they're putting it into the Greek so that those who don't have the original language will be able to recognize that if he's called the twin, but when would they call him that?

You know, nobody actually addresses Thomas as Didymus. Nobody says, by the way, Didymus, come and do this, come and do that, or whatever. He's called it. When has he ever called it?

He is called the twin simply by fact of being called Thomas. Simply by the fact of the name that he is given, which is, as we say, almost certainly a nickname, to distinguish him from others with the same name.

We all know what that's like. You know, the island is full of people with nicknames. It's a necessity. When so many people have either the same last name, as in many parts of the different parts of the island, they do here and elsewhere, and they've often got the same Christian names, not least because the Christian names are often passed down through the generations.

[13 : 09] So how are you going to distinguish between lots of different people with the same name? You have to give them nicknames. And you give them nicknames either related to something to do with one of their parents, or where they live, or where they come from, or something particular about them, or whatever.

So this is a nickname. This is a nickname that identifies this particular disciple, whose actual name may or may not have been Judas, like at least two of the other disciples.

Now, Thomas is named in all the lists that there are of the apostles. And that's something that can't be said for all of them.

No, but he used to Matthew chapter 10, in verse 3, Mark chapter 3, verse 8, Luke chapter 6, verse 15. And then John, of course, doesn't have a list of the apostles as such.

But what we do find in chapter 21 is that when they're all back in Galilee and about to go off fishing, Peter says, you know, I'm going fishing, there were together, verse 2 in John 21, Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, two other of his disciples, and we've said in the past, those are probably Philip and Andrew, but look at where Thomas is named.

[14:26] Name order is significant in the Bible. Word order is significant. There he is, for whatever reason, at John 21, he is named straight after Peter.

For some reason, we don't know exactly what. Now, by the time you get to Acts chapter 1, he's not listed immediately after Peter there. He's just listed with the other disciples.

Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew. That's more normal. Further down the list, but for whatever reason, in John 21, verse 2, he's named straight after Peter, as though he's been given an additional prominence.

You know, we know that Jesus made a special appearance to Peter by himself, because we're told that in Scripture. Now, this special appearance to Thomas was not by himself, but almost certainly, it was a special appearance just for Thomas' benefit.

Thomas called Didymus, the twin, in Greek, the twin, the twin, in Aramaic, whatever his original given name was. This is how he's identified by his nickname.

[15:35] But what does Jesus actually say to him when he addresses him by name? Yes, he says, he says, he says, he says, reach your hand, put your finger here into the wounds. Thomas doesn't do that.

He doesn't need it. But Jesus says to him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.

Now, it's as near a rebuke, perhaps, as Jesus might come, but it's not really a rebuke. Because as we mentioned earlier, Thomas' attitude is one of one who loves the Lord and wants to believe, but just isn't going to be fooled.

In all fairness, you know, Jesus has cautioned his disciples in the past. Matthew 24, verses 4 and 5, Jesus answered and said unto them, take heed that no man deceive you.

For many shall come in my name saying, I am Christ and shall deceive many. Jesus himself had said that. He warned his disciples, look, after I'm gone, other people will come and say, I'm Christ, I'm Christ, and so on.

[16:42] And here's Thomas saying, look, how do I know you? I've not always been fooled. How do I know somebody hasn't presented themselves as Jesus? And because you're all so stricken with grief, you want to believe it.

But as soon as he sees Jesus, he knows it's the real Jesus. He doesn't need any further convincing. He's not wrong to be reserved.

He's not wrong to want to be convinced. And as we mentioned earlier, there is all the difference in the world between those who are just really out of hand, just dismissing anything to do with Christ and say, of course I don't believe that.

It's all nonsense. And those who say, I would love to believe that. I really want to believe that. But even within that, there are two different sort of attitudes to that.

They'll always say, oh yeah, I'd love to believe that. I really envy those who've got faith. You know, I just can't bring myself to do it. You know, I think it's not intellectually viable. I can't bring myself to put trust in somebody I haven't seen or whatever and I think they're wrong but I would love to have their kind of faith.

[17:45] But that's almost a kind of self-satisfied kind of dismissive superior. So, oh, I wish I hadn't been but sadly I don't because I'm just too clever. I'm just too intellectual and I'm just too scientifically based to want to put my trust in someone like I.

I would love to but I just can't. I'm sorry. And there are those on the other hand saying, I would love that faith that they have got. I would love to have that Christ as my Savior.

I wish that I could only I don't. And there is that attitude that longs after Christ but just is not yet persuaded. Well, friends, if we are not yet persuaded but want to be then the obvious and easy

thing to do is as Jesus has said ask.

Ask him. Ask and it shall be given. Seek and ye shall find and it shall be opened unto you. Jesus said, Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.

This, friends, is why Thomas had to be the last one in the series because where Thomas is is just on the threshold, the other side just of the threshold of where we ourselves are.

[19:07] Thomas had the opportunity, you might say, to be one who would say, yeah, James, I haven't seen but I believe. But no, he's a disciple like all the other apostles and you could say he's entitled to what they are.

But Jesus said, yep, you got it, you got what you wanted but more blessed are those who not having your benefit, not having what you had, they will still believe and they will still trust and they are, if anything, more blessed.

And this, friends, a few thousand years down the line is where we find ourselves. Just as the first generation did immediately after the apostles. Think of those to whom Paul and the others spread the gospel.

The likes of Timothy, the likes of Titus and others and so on that as far as we know never set eyes on Jesus physically. They never saw him rising from the dead.

They never knew him when he walked in Galilee. They never saw him crucified but they believed.

That first generation post the apostles believed and all the generations since then believed and these things are written, verse 31, that he might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing he might have life through his name.

[20:23] We believe because of the testimony of those who were there. The testimony of those who were the eyewitnesses. As John himself says in his own first letter when he says at the beginning, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which was from the beginning which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled with the word of life for the life was manifested and we have seen it and bear witness and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you that ye also may have fellowship with us and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. These are the testimony, the witness of those who saw, like the battle of Waterloo, there's nobody left alive who was there.

There's nobody left alive who could speak and say, yes, I remember how it was. I remember seeing Napoleon on his white horse and seeing Wellington over there and I remember the clash of the armies and so on.

No, there's nobody left who does that but people wrote down, people wrote down their accounts and their accounts of the battle and their eyewitness testimony, people painted pictures, people were left alive for years afterwards and told others and so we believe it.

We believe it as a matter of historical record. You can see the place where it happened and still the battlefield there, although it's changed somewhat but you can still go to Palestine, you can still go to Israel, of Judea, and Jerusalem.

[21:52] Of course, it's changed but everywhere there is the witness and the testimony of what actually happened there. Do we believe it or do we have to be eyewitnesses ourselves? Well, we ourselves, of course, not going to be eyewitnesses.

Jesus is not going to say, well, if you don't believe, that's okay, I'll just do a little bit of time travel, take you back to the first century and show you me living and working and healing people even when he was alive, even when he physically raised the dead and opened the eyes of the blind and did miracles and cleansed the lepers and taught in the temple, most people still didn't believe in who he was.

They still didn't believe this was the Son of God. So being present there is no guarantee that your heart is going to be changed and your life is going to be converted. But these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you might have life through his name.

What we have received in the testimony, the witness, the written record is in and of itself sufficient when it is brought alive by God's Spirit.

Of course, a complete atheist can read the Bible from cover to cover. Of course, he can read all the words and say, what total rubbish and cast it aside. Of course, a dry intellectual can read it and marvel at the use of language and the way the Greek or the Hebrew is constructed and so on and they can delight in it as a work of literature and still be unmoved.

[23 : 28] But by the grace of God, the Spirit of God is ready and willing to work through the written word to change hearts and lives and convert souls even now.

These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing ye might have life through his name because blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.

Thomas is not asked to be inferior to the other apostles. He is not asking for anything they haven't already got. Jesus is completely fair.

He is completely just. He does not say, well, Thomas, you should jolly well have faith. You know, because the others took a bit of convincing but they're all convinced now so you just be the odd one out, Thomas, and you just believe yourself even though you haven't seen it.

I'm going to punish you if you don't. God is not like that. God is absolutely fair, absolutely just and he is able to discern the difference between that which is a genuine plea, a genuine request for God's help as we seek to put our trust and faith in him.

[24 : 42] God's help as we seek to understand what it is we must believe and how we must turn to Christ. We know not what to pray for as we ought.

And thankfully, as Romans tells us, the Spirit help with our infirmities, with groans which cannot be uttered. When we don't know what words to use, the Spirit gives us utterance because he knows what it is that we want to say.

What you have is sufficient. And this is what Jesus is effectively saying to Thomas. Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed.

Nothing wrong with that. It's good. It's right. It was acceptable to Jesus to review himself, especially for Thomas. But, bless her they that have not seen and yet have believed.

In this one verse, we cross over from the apostolic age of eyewitness to all the other ages that will follow because Thomas and the other apostles were unique, in a sense, in their generation.

[25 : 52] As I said, simply having been around when Jesus was physically alive was no guarantee that everybody would believe just because they saw him, just because they knew him. It was people that knew him and people that had seen his works and people that had listened to his teaching who arranged for him to be crucified.

So, it's no guarantee of conversion just to have been there at the time when Jesus was physically there but, to put our trust and faith in Christ on the strength of what we receive, the strength of what we read, which is God's infallible word, the witness and testimony handed down through the ages and millennia of those who did see, those who did witness and who do speak the truth and the witness and testimony like what?

Of lives in every, every generation and every place and every country and nation under heaven to whom the gospel has come because in every place where the gospel has come there have been somebody, some people, some few or many who have been converted, who have been changed and whose lives have been touched not by a dead book, by a living saviour and that is what transforms lives in this day and age and in this island and in this nation and in this present day. Lives are changed, hearts are touched by a living saviour, a living Christ speaking through a living word.

What we have is sufficient and more than sufficient and putting our trust in a saviour whom we can come to know for ourselves and believe in and experience but not yet see with the eye of the flesh.

[27 : 56] that is more blessed than to have seen him with the eyes that the apostles did and that may make us think, well we are not more blessed than the apostles, surely not.

In that regard, Jesus says that we are upon us because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.

It is an encouragement to us. It is an encouragement to every generation who has been required with their trust in an unseen saviour.

It is said, I am not one myself so I don't know but it is said, that of those who are twins there is a particular affinity between the two twins that they can in a sense feel things the other one feels or sense something about the other one's presence or connect in a certain way with what the other one's thinking.

I don't know if that is so but I have heard it said on different occasions by different people. Certainly to be a twin is to be in a special relationship.

[29 : 08] We have not a clue as to who Thomas' other twin was. We don't know whether it was another boy or whether it was a boy and a girl twins, non-identical, whether they were identical twins, whether they were just similar or whatever.

We don't know. We don't know whether his twin was also a follower of Jesus. We don't know anything about him but there is supposedly meant to be a particular affinity between the twin and their sibling.

Now all of us who are in Christ are brothers and sisters in Christ in a special way and although we may not be physically twins one with another here is one with whom I would suggest to you in all reverence we are very much each one a spiritual twin.

Here is one who needed convincing so that he would be enabled to believe not so because he could continue in cynicism and unbelief and doubt and defiance but rather so that he could have the same joy that the other disciples had that he could share in that which others had already experienced but until he was convinced he would not do it.

He feared to make a mistake. It's not wrong to fear to make a mistake. Thomas and you and me we are so similar in so many ways.

[30 : 40] We fear to commit to that which might be the ruination of our lives might completely change the direction of it might affect us in ways that we don't want to be affected but rather what we find when we put our trust in Christ is not only that we encounter my Lord and my God but that our lives are never the same again.

They are transformed they are renewed they are given a vigour they are given a freshness they are given a meaning and a purpose and an eternal dimension which the world simply can't give and never has Thomas wanted to see for himself friends we want to see for ourselves too if we're honest which of us if we had the chance to see Jesus physically in front of us wouldn't say yes I'll take that I'll grab that opportunity I want to see Jesus like the Greeks of old sir we would see Jesus and so we would which of us doesn't want that and friend the day will come when you will whether you are lost and see him only as you return or judge before we are condemned to a lost eternity or whether you behold him as a beloved saviour we will see Jesus you will see him with these very eyes which now behold everything around you you will see him as

George said yet in my flesh shall I see God but for now what we have is sufficient these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God and that believing you might have life through his name with Thomas our spiritual twin if we can see that we are at this threshold he is on one side and we are on the other he has seen with the eyes of flesh we have not but we are of that next generation blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved that was the message for the Philippian jailer that is the message for us here at the end of John 20 it is the message for every generation that has been and has yet to come it is the same Christ is the living God who will transform your life if you will come to him by faith who will give you life in all its fullness who will make it so that on your deathbed you will never have to say what was the meaning of my life what on earth was the purpose of it all he is the purpose he is the reason he is the fulfillment Christ

Jesus is the beginning and the end of it all and we have looked at those whom Jesus in his mercy has addressed by name no doubt there were others but these ones are recorded for us but if you are called to follow Christ and there are none whom he does not invite there are none whom he excludes then you may be sure that when he calls you he does so by name God bless you Lord Lord that is going to be as as who I post a what there are