

John 21:18

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[0 : 0 0] John 21 verse 28 And Thomas answered and said to Jesus, My Lord and my God.

I think it's sometimes beneficial for us to look at some of those characters of whom mention is made in God's word as in every case, with the exception of Krush, of our saviour himself, these characters are brought before us warts and all, as Oliver Cromwell once famously put it, a reminder to us that the best of men and women are but men and women at best.

There is only one to whom we can look, in whom there is no fault, the one to whom they looked and in whom they believed and for whom they sought to live their lives.

There are many such men and women that we could turn to this evening, but I just want to focus on one of them tonight and perhaps tomorrow look at a woman whose story we can learn much from as we prepare for the Lord's table.

Tonight I want to look with you at one of the twelve men whom Jesus called to be his disciples. As you know, they were quite a mixed group and that in itself reminds us that as well as unity, there is diversity in the church of Christ.

[1 : 5 4] We're not the clones of each other. We're not all alike. We're not all the same. But we all have, if we're in Christ, the same Saviour and the same Lord in common.

Tonight I want to look with you at a disciple who has had a rather bad press. One who has been maligned and misrepresented.

I believe beyond anything he deserved. And one with whose name we have become familiar even in our English language. We often hear doubting Thomas being mentioned sometimes by people who if you were to ask them wouldn't have the first idea who Thomas was.

I believe that it's in some ways sad that whenever the name of Thomas is mentioned the first thing we think about is that incident where he doubted the testimony in relation to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

But when we look at what the Bible tells us about Thomas and I want to focus tonight on the Gospel according to John we're left in no doubt that Thomas was a genuine follower of Jesus and one whose heart's desire it was to learn at the feet of Jesus.

[3 : 3 3] He is often portrayed as a prime example of stubborn refusal to believe anything that cannot be proven to be true. And although that may certainly be true of him in relation to the incident that we read about there in John 20 I think that it's at least highly questionable whether he deserves such harsh judgment.

It's all too easy to point the finger and condemn in others what we ourselves may at times be even more guilty of. So on this Friday night of Ascalpi Communion as we examine our own hearts while it is true that we may be able to identify with Thomas in relation to his doubts I pray that as we look at what John tells us about him that we will also be able to identify with Thomas in some other aspects of his character and conduct.

And that that will be an encouragement to us as we prepare and as we examine ourselves before coming to the Lord's table on his day.

We read there that the name Thomas Didymus means twin. Whether or not he had a twin we're not told but the name certainly reflected his personality.

Thomas knew what it was to experience conflict between faith and unbelief between doubt and devotion and so on. And in that respect I'm sure that most of us would agree that he is so very like ourselves.

[5 : 29] We don't know very much about Thomas' background but there is a reference to him in John 21 down by the Sea of Tiberias and that might suggest that he had been a fisherman before he was called with others to become a fisher of men.

We don't know how he began to follow Jesus but we do know from what is recorded of him in the Gospels and also in Acts chapter 1 which we'll look at towards the end of this sermon.

There are several facets of his character and conduct that come to light that I think would be beneficial for us to reflect on tonight. And the first of these that I want to look at with you is Thomas' great courage.

Our first meeting tonight was from John chapter 11 and the background to that as you will know from John 10 is that these were dangerous times for Jesus.

The Jews had picked up stones in order to put Jesus to death. they had tried to arrest him but he had escaped from their hands.

[6 : 43] And then as Jesus is across the Jordan baptising news comes that Lazarus his friend is ill. And as we read Jesus instead of going to where Lazarus is straight away Jesus stayed for two days right there where he was and afterwards he said to the disciples let's go to Judea again.

And of course they protested as you would expect. They said to Rabbi the Jews were just now seeking to stone you.

Are you going there again? And Jesus answered in words that we read are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day he does not stumble because he sees the light of this world.

But if anyone walks in the night he stumbles because the light is not in. Jesus is saying to the disciples let's go right back into the dangerous room.

His disciples would just mention object. object. But Jesus plainly wants them to go. Jesus tells them Lazarus has died and he says for you saints I'm glad that I was not there so that you may believe.

[8 : 11] Then Jesus says to them let us go to him and Thomas called the twin said to the rest of the disciples let us also go that we may die with him.

Let us also go that we may die with Jesus. Thomas is obviously so devoted so committed to Jesus and so courageous in the way in which he speaks.

I think Thomas has grasped the meaning of the paragon that Jesus has just spoken in terms of the night and the day. And I believe Thomas understands that the Lord is saying now is the time for work.

And so realising what Jesus is about he stirs the rest of the disciples and he calls them to action. He says we have nothing to lose if we go with Jesus even if we die.

What great courage Thomas shows shows at this point. For Jesus sake Thomas is prepared to bring whatever may be in the cup for him.

[9 : 30] And so he gives this rallying call to the rest of the disciples. He speaks with great courage and conviction. Come on let us go with Jesus.

Yes Thomas was going to fail Jesus as we all do. Thomas may not have fully understood all that was involved but from what Thomas says he's obviously sincere, he really means it, his determined and his resolute.

Thomas more than any of the rest of them at this moment has that faithful to death mindset that would put many of them to shame.

Thomas couldn't be disloyal to Jesus whatever lay ahead his willy to take the risk as the song puts it where duty calls or danger be never failing there.

And so as we meet Thomas here in John chapter 11 he's expressing his love for Jesus his loyalty to Jesus he said we'll not deserve Jesus we'll go with him and if necessary we will die with him and they went.

[10 : 59] You see Thomas' courage influenced and encouraged the rest of them to obey Jesus. His demands went deep to Jesus but so did Thomas' devotion.

He's willing to go into the very jaws of death with his Lord and he backs up what he says with his actions. He doesn't just say let's go he goes and he takes the rest with him.

He's got no thought of running away at this point and Thomas is in many ways the forward of all who are prepared to go whatever it costs and follow Jesus.

I wonder where that leaves us here tonight. Do we have the courage to stand up for Jesus? Do we have the courage to identify ourselves with Jesus whatever the cost?

When we realise what Jesus has done for us then no sacrifice in the words of C.T. Studd can be too great for us to make for him.

[12 : 19] The home writer said Thomas is a man of great courage love.

Love so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all. Thomas is a man of great courage as he follows his Lord.

But there is much more brought to our attention by John in his gospel account about John that we can learn from. And the next mention that we have of Thomas and John is in chapter 14 again which we read together.

Sometimes great heights are followed by low points. And here Jesus is saying to them little children yet a little while I am with you where I'm going you cannot come.

And Simon Peter asked him where he was going to which Jesus answered where I am going you cannot follow me now but you will follow me afterwards.

[13 : 35] And Peter says why can't I follow you? I will lay down my life for you. And Jesus warned him that before the cock would crow he would deny him three times.

And all of them all of them without exception said similar words to Peter. But Jesus then went on and he spoke to them about the grace of why it was necessary for him to die.

And he's asking them not to be troubled in their hearts. He's saying you believe in God believe also in me. He tells them he's going to prepare a place for them and that he's going to take them to be with him.

And Thomas says to them Lord we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way? Thomas is honest in asking this genuine question of his Lord.

We don't know where you're going. How can we know the way? And Jesus of course responds in the famous words of chapter 14 verse 6 I am the way and the truth and the life.

[14 : 53] No one comes to the Father except through me. And there we find as Thomas asks the question that Jesus is prepared to answer the question for him.

Jesus has been speaking about heaven and Thomas doesn't understand but he asks the question of Jesus and he's given the answer.

You know we may have many unanswered questions as we seek to follow the Lord. There may be many things that we don't understand but we would do well if like Thomas we took all our questions to the Lord.

We poured out our hearts before him and as we do so and as we seek assurance from his word even in relation to where we stand with God tonight he will give us that clarity he will give us that assurance as Jesus responds to Thomas' question he speaks of himself and he says I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the father but by me and tonight that's what Jesus wants us to know he wants us to know that he's the way without which there is no going to God that he is the truth without which we can have no knowledge of God and that he is the life without which there is nothing but spiritual death Thomas asks the question of Jesus and

Jesus gives him the answer that he needs perhaps we're here tonight and we're lacking assurance and we're asking our questions and we're even wondering where we are in relation to Jesus Christ tonight let's look at this passage and let's learn from the fact that Thomas was willing to ask him the question Thomas was willing to tell the truth Thomas didn't pretend to be what he wasn't Thomas is honest before Jesus and Jesus answers his question and sheds great light upon on the most important truth of all namely how we can come to know God and be sure of going to heaven this weekend is going to be remembering the Lord's death until he comes and it's of crucial importance that we go to the

[17 : 42] Lord with all the questions that we have in relation to him and in relation to everything to do with our own Christian lives and if we're lacking assurance tonight that we are the Lord's ask to show you from his word who he is and what he's done and to show you from his word that you have come to know him personally so that for you you need no longer be in any doubt as to where you stand in relation to him you believe in God Jesus says believe also trust also in me Thomas is prepared to ask the question and the Lord clarifies the most important truth of all to Thomas Pishman and he can do the same for you and for me tonight it may be that there's someone here tonight and you lack this blessed assurance that

Jesus is yours you may go wondering for example if you love the Lord well he in his word wants to clarify that for you because he tells you in his word that this is how we can know that we love him if we obey and keep his commands and do not find his commandments burdensome so tonight do you delight in seeking to obey the Lord do you delight tonight in seeking to do his will if you do then that is evidence that you have a lamb for the Lord in your heart this is how we know that we are says God in his word whatever it is you may want to be given assurance of this evening go to the Lord as promised and say to we don't know I don't know but you show me with a teachable spirit go to him and he will not fail you

Jesus says come to me and learn of me the word disciple means not just follow it but learn if you are willing to sit at his feet and learn of him then that shows that you have a teachable spirit and it is evidence that something spiritual that is not of this world is going on in your life in God's word again and again we're told that he brings his people to the place where they are persuaded of who he is and of the fact that there is nothing in all creation that can separate them from his love and if you're here this evening seeking clarification before the Lord's table as to whether or not you genuinely are his go to him with whatever it is that is on your mind and heart as Thomas does and he will shed light for you or whatever question you may have trust in

God trust also in him and yet and yet and yet we may be here tonight and we may know what it is to have had periods in our lives where we were assured in relation to our salvation and we were in no doubt as to where we stood before God and yet for various reasons there may be times when we lack that assurance we may lack it because we have the sin in our hearts God's word tells us that if we have sin in our heart he will not hear us there may be times when for different reasons because of personal circumstances we're not quite as fully assured as we are at other times God's word wants us to know that we are his and if you have great concern genuinely before God tonight is to know for sure that you are his go to him and ask him to clarify that for you by his spirit and he will not let you down but even having said that we discover in the next episode that

John records in connection with Thomas that even though he was a man of great courage and even although he had this great clarity shed for him by Jesus there in John 14 in relation to knowing him and the way to heaven in John chapter 20 which is probably the incident that Thomas is best known for we find him plunging into great confusion I don't need to read the passage again we are so familiar with it but you know what happened the Lord appears when Thomas is not there on the evening of that day the first day of the week the disciples are there and the doors are locked because they're afraid of the Jews and Jesus comes and stands among them and Jesus says peace be with you now

[23 : 19] Thomas one of the twelve called the twin was not with them when Jesus came now we're not told why he wasn't there we're not told that so there's no real profit in speculating there's all sorts of speculation as to why he wasn't there but all we know is what we have in revelation and as someone once said there's not been revelation not to go into speculation all told is that he wasn't there when Jesus came so naturally the other disciples when they saw Thomas again told him we've seen the Lord what you would expect them to tell and then Thomas responds and he says unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails and unless I place my finger into the mark of the nails and place my hand into his side

I will never believe he must doubt or what the others had experienced not having been with them but here he said unless I see for myself I will not believe he's not saying that the resurrection was impossible but he adopts what we might call a rationalist attitude and says unless I see the heavens for myself I am not going to believe he's obviously not willing to accept their testimony at face by you you know he wasn't the only one who found it difficult to grasp the truth of the resurrection even the two on the amaze road they were downcast down the mouth they thought it was all over and this mysterious stranger comes alongside them and you know the rest how eventually they realised that it was the

Lord who had been with them and that confusion was taken away and they realised that it was not over that in a very real sense this was the beginning great confusion Thomas wasn't the only one and I venture to suggest that in your lives as a believer just as in mine there have been and may still be times when were characterised by great confusion faith is often attacked by unbelief Lord I believe said another you have my unbelief was it not a famous Gaelic hymn writer who said that when there was living faith unbelief would be in pursuit of it and here

Thomas he's had this great clarity given to him by Jesus as he's asked him his question back in chapter 14 and now we find him in chapter 20 he's saying unless I see for myself unless the evidence is presented to me then I will not believe later on he will realise that faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen but can we not identify at times with Thomas if we're honest and say that we too know what it is on occasion to to be as he is here plagued by unbelief the fact that we may be plagued at times by unbelief in no way proves that we're not the lords in actual fact it is those who are the lords who are most troubled by unbelief there are many times when we are confused and as one famously said the more

I know the more I know how it lords more if the truth be told in terms of spiritual things we grow in the knowledge of our own ignorance as we grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ because we come to understand that it is in him that all the pressures of wisdom and of knowledge are fit and we come to see in contrast how utterly ignorant we ourselves often are and how like Thomas we can often be no less guilty of saying that unless we have evidence we won't believe maybe there's someone here it's just a thought maybe there's someone here I don't know and in relation even to this weekend and the communion table maybe you have said unless I get this sign and the sign is only known to yourself and the Lord there's no way I'm going forward the Lord has given you a sign a sign of the prophet children the death and resurrection of Jesus and it is that that we commemorate it is that that we remember and if you trust us in

[29 : 15] Christ tonight crucified and risen then the Lord commands you to do this in remembrance of you don't need to look for any other sign you have God's word for it do this in remembrance of me and and and together we write the story of how although there is this great confusion Jesus doesn't leave them in darkness eight eight days later they are there again and this time Thomas is with them and the Lord appears again even though the doors were locked Jesus came and stood among them and said peace be with you and then knowing full well the confusion that had been in

Thomas' mind and still landed there knowing full well everything that Thomas had said in response to the disciples testimony Jesus said to Thomas put your finger here and see my hands and put out your hand and place it in my sight do not just believe but believe and Thomas answered him and at last we'll come to a text of that happened with it my Lord and my God and Jesus said to him have you believed because you've seen blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed believed and that leads to Thomas and we find

Thomas here making this great confession what a confession of me my Lord and my God I read somewhere and you can check it out that this is the only instance we have in the Gospels of an individual addressing Jesus directly and saying to my God a unique confession among all the other confessions of the New Testament my Lord and my God what a what a testament what a confession that is his response to Jesus revealing himself to him is one of confidence and commitment and it is a confession of faith that I believe is one of the most wonderful that we have anywhere in the

Bible in some ways it is only now that Thomas receives what the rest of them have been enjoying for a whole week namely the assurance that Jesus is a lie and that Jesus is victor over death and once he realises it once the Lord reveals himself to him as he does so graciously he can't hold back from making this great confession and that I believe is what the Lord is asking of all who that does at this communion season because God's word again and again emphasises the importance of confessing him as Lord let me just quote several scriptures to back that up and if any one of them speaks to us so be it praise be to him

Paul says if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead you will be saved that's the sign that's all you need Jesus says anyone who confesses me or indeed everyone who confesses me before men I will confess before my father who is in heaven on the other hand we read whoever denies the son does not have the father the one who confesses the son has the father also whoever confesses that Jesus is the son of God God abides in him Simon Peter of course answered from that memorable location at Caesarea Philippi when Jesus asked who do men say that I am all the answers some say Jeremiah one of the prophets and then he says who do you say that

[34 : 40] I am and Simon Peter said you are the Christ the son of the living God and Jesus said to him you are blessed Simon son of John that was not revealed to you by flesh or blood but by my father your father in heaven you are the Christ the son of the living God Nathaniel of course recognized that when he was called to be a follower of this Rabbi you are the son of God you are the king of Israel the woman of Samaria having met with Jesus went back and said come see a man who told me everything I ever did who is not this the Christ there are so many different scriptures scriptures underlined for us the necessity of personal confession of faith Philip said to the the open dinner if you believe with all your heart you may be baptized and he answered and said

I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God and just one more in 1st John 4 2 by this you know the spirit of God every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God a great confession will you hold back from confessing the Lord or will you gladly identify with his people as we confess his name it's not about our worthiness it's about whose worthiness it's not about our goodness it's all about whose goodness and whose mercy and whose grace and having made that great confession Jesus speaks words that really come through in a wonderful way to Thomas that although he believed because he saw and heard blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed the Lord confirming there that we don't need to look for any other sign apart from the one that has been given that proves to us who Jesus is and this is the turn of the gospel that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures and rose again the third day according to the scriptures that's the gospel what are we doing tonight can you identify with

Thomas as you reflect on who Jesus is and what he has done and say as he said to him before a watching world and before all his people my Lord and my God when Jesus confirms to Thomas that he's blessed but that those who have not seen and have believed are also blessed but there is further confirmation given by Jesus to Thomas in relation to where it stands spiritually in John chapter 21 we read there that Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the sea of Tiberias and he revealed himself in this way Simon Peter

Thomas called the twin Nathaniel of Cana and Galilee the sons of Sepity and two others of his disciples were together Simon Peter said to them I'm going fishing they said to him we will go with you and they went out and got into the boat but that night they caught nothing Thomas is there with the disciples Thomas is there confirming that after these great events he still has his place with the people of God with the followers of Jesus and Thomas as we read on God demonstrates again and again that he's now convinced and he's prepared to be found costing what it may in the company of the

Lord's people he understands and he accepts and he's found there with them and the Lord comes to them and the Lord thrusts them out into a ministry of a new kind to the one that they had enjoyed before and after our Lord has ascended into him after our Lord has gone back to his father where do we find Thomas in Acts chapter one we're told that the disciples returned to Jerusalem from the Mount called Olivet and when they had entered they went up to the upper room where they were staying and who's there Peter and

[40 : 45] John and James and Andrew Philip and yes he's not absent now Thomas is there with them and Bartholomew and Matthew and James the son of Alphias and Simon the Selet and Judas the son of James and what are they doing what are they doing there in the other room with Thomas right there among them all of them with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer together with the woman and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brother he's found there in the company of the Lord's people enjoying communion with them as one who despite all the doubts that he's expressed is still as we can't show last glimpse of him in the scriptures demonstrating his devotion and his dedication to his

Lord this is not what we desire tonight it with the Lord's people we want to be proud with we want to be proud as Thomas has found enjoying full communion with them his fellowship his communion is with our heavenly father and with his son Jesus Christ he is there with the rest of them worshipping the Lord and here we are at this communion weekend encouraging one another to gather together what does communion mean it means that our communion is with God because of what Jesus has done for us as Thomas came to understand and as we come I trust to understand and we're here identifying ourselves not only with him but with one another as brothers and sisters in

Christ and that's where Thomas is found in the upper room with his brothers and his sisters they're not excluded they're there too it's not just the disciples who are there but they're together with the woman and with Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers whose people are Thomas's people because their God is his God their Jesus is his Jesus their Lord is his Lord my Lord and my God he said it himself but a bit new is that our testimony tonight as we prepare for the Lord's tale when we be found with those who are the Lord's Ruth said your people my people your God my God I am a companion of all who fear you of all those who keep your presence

Malachi tells us those who feared the Lord spoke with one another what did the Lord think of it the Lord paid attention and heard them and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name what does the Lord say about his people they shall deny says the Lord of hosts in the day when I may get my precious possession and I will spare them as a man's gracious son who serves them then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve him and so we find Thomas in this great company enjoying this great communion as one who has had this great confirmation in relation to what his

Lord has done for him as one who has made this great confession my Lord see how personal that is and my God as one whose confusion has been removed by the clarity that the Lord has shed into his mind in relation to these things and as one who is full of courage and prepared as he was at the beginning to be found with the people of God who dared the cost and prepared to go where the Lord would have him go in his service what about us tonight is it true of us that we have had this clarity given us by God's spirit in relation to what Jesus has done us is it true of us that when we experience times of great confusion in relation to our own spiritual standing that we take these things to the Lord and that we receive great clarity from him that leads us to make this great confession my Lord and my

[46 : 23] God and receive confirmation from the Lord that we are those and that he's got work for us to do and that he wants us to be in the company of his people we read about the company of people of whom Thomas was part that they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers and all came on every soul and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles and all who believed were together and had all things in common and they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributed in the proceeds to all as any had need and day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes they received their fruit with glad and generous hearts praising God and having favour with all the people and the Lord added to their number day by day wonderful time that must have been those who would be saved may God tonight enable each one of us to come to him to cast all our cares on him as Thomas surely did and know that he cares for us and may we respond to what he has done for us by openly and unashamedly identifying ourselves as his people with his people not only on the

Lord's day at the Lord's table but every day for as long as he leads us in this world Lord bless these thoughts in the word can in them let all