

## **“What Will It Take?” John 20:24-29**

### **Read text**

When we were children, we would share certain “truths” that could not be disputed. They were truths like, “Don’t cross your eyes because they will stay that way.” Or, “Don’t crack your knuckles or you will have nobby fingers.” Or “Eat your carrots and you will have better eyesight – ever see a rabbit with glasses?”

Now we never questioned these truths as children, because everyone knew they were true. How did we know? Did we look it up in a scientific journal? Did we consult a doctor or scientist? No, we knew these things were true because mother said they were! At least that is what we told one another (not sure our mothers actually did say these things!)

What will it take for you to believe?

I ask that in the context of the resurrection of Jesus. In our text, which recounts two different events that are connected by a common character, Thomas, this is the question that is being explored.

The first part of the story starts on Resurrection Sunday. Much to the surprise and delight of the disciples, Jesus comes to them in the upper room where they have gathered. This was the third day after they had witnessed the crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus, so to see him alive and well was truly miraculous!

What we learn in this passage is that on that evening when Jesus appeared, Thomas was not present. We are not told why Thomas was not there, we are simply told he was not there. For the past three years the disciples did nearly everything together. Following Jesus they travelled together, ate together, lodged in the same homes. But now Jesus was gone, or that is what Thomas believed, and the urgency to be with the other disciples seems to be gone. Thomas was somewhere else that night, and he missed the coming of Jesus.

A quick aside – I am sure not one of us would want to miss the coming of Jesus. Had Thomas known Jesus would show up that night he surely would have been there. He should have known the tomb was not the end of the story, but the message did not get through to him. He did not believe Jesus would come back from the dead.

As we think of Thomas missing the coming of Jesus that night, we are stirred with this thought: Jesus is coming again, and we certainly do not want to miss out on that meeting! Scripture tells us that Jesus will come back, the dead will be raised and the living will be caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air. Every person will see this event, but not every person will be ready for this event. We must live today in anticipation of the return of Christ, walking in faith and obedience so that we will not be like Thomas and miss out on meeting with Jesus.

How will we be ready for the return of Christ? “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved,” the disciples told those who asked how they too could be saved.

What will it take for you to believe?

The disciples told Thomas the wonderful news – Jesus was alive and they all had seen him. Jesus had come to them as they gathered in the upper room, and talked with them, ate with them, even scolded them. But he was very much alive!

Thomas heard them, but he did not believe them. Their encounter with Jesus, as wonderful as that was for them, was of no help to him. He needed to have his own encounter with Jesus. He even described what that encounter would have to look like: he would have to see the nail holes in Jesus' hands and put his fingers in them, along with putting his hand in the wound made by the spear in the side of Jesus. Then he would believe.

This refusal of Thomas to accept the witness of the disciples is what has earned him the nickname, "Doubting Thomas."

Before we get too hard on Thomas, he does have a point. We all must have our own encounter with Jesus. The experience of someone else is not enough to save us. We may learn from the testimonies of others, be inspired and encouraged, but in the end, we each must have an encounter with Jesus for ourselves. Each of us must meet Jesus by faith, confess our sin, and ask for his forgiveness and infilling. Thomas was not wrong when he wanted to see Jesus for himself. That should be the desire of each one of us.

Where Thomas goes wrong is that he sets the conditions that must be met before he will believe. He says he must see the scars on Jesus' hands, and put his finger in them, and put his hand in the wound on Jesus' side. Only when these conditions have been met will he believe.

So what will it take for you to believe?

Throughout Jesus' ministry this was the question presented to the people – What will it take for you to believe? Many came seeking healing and deliverance, but would they believe even after that? The religious leaders watched Jesus perform miracles but still did not believe. In fact, as Jesus was hanging on the cross they taunted him and said they would believe, if he came down off that cross. Of course they had no intention of actually believing in Jesus.

To this day people come to Jesus with their agendas for belief. If Jesus would heal them of their cancer then they would believe. If Jesus would cure their daughter, then they would believe. If Jesus would save their business, then they would believe. King Herod tried this approach in Jesus' day, and he said that if Jesus would do a miracle for him he would believe (cf. Luke 23:8). Jesus refused to play along because he knew what was in the heart of that man.

What about you today? What are you demanding Jesus do for you before you will believe?

A week later Jesus appears once again to his disciples. I hope you noticed that Jesus' resurrection was on a Sunday, and this next appearance to the disciples is on a Sunday as well. Jesus is establishing a pattern for worship on the first day of the week, which came to be called Sunday. I have a book in my library that asks the question, "Who changed the Sabbath?" The answer to that is simple, "Jesus did."

This time Thomas is present with the rest of the disciples when Jesus comes to them once again. It is interesting to note that right away Jesus addresses the “demands” that Thomas made. He gave an invitation to Thomas:

“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Jesus knew exactly what Thomas had said to the disciples behind closed doors earlier. There is nothing hidden from our God. The Psalmist reflects on this in Psalm 139:

You have searched me, LORD,  
and you know me.

<sup>2</sup>You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

<sup>3</sup>You discern my going out and my lying down;  
you are familiar with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup>Before a word is on my tongue  
you, LORD, know it completely.

<sup>5</sup>You hem me in behind and before,  
and you lay your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup>Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
too lofty for me to attain.

<sup>7</sup>Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?

Thomas learned very quickly that you cannot flee the presence of Jesus. Thomas may not have seen Jesus, but Jesus always saw Thomas. He knew where he was, what he was doing and even what he was thinking. This powerful truth hit Thomas so hard that he immediately began to worship Jesus, saying, “My Lord and my God!”

Who else could have known what Thomas was saying to the disciples without being there? Who else knows what is going on in the heart of man? Who else would not scold but would give an invitation to believe? Only God.

Did you notice that Thomas does not check out the wounds of Jesus like he said he would? He simply believed! There in the presence of Jesus he could do nothing else but believe.

Thomas needed an experience of the Living Christ, and then his doubts melted away and he believed. What will it take for you to believe today?

Sometimes in a worship service the presence of Jesus is so real that a person cannot help but know Jesus is with us.

At other times, in your prayer time, Jesus makes himself known to you in such a wonderful way that you know he is real.

Sometimes as you read the scriptures, Jesus makes himself known to you in a powerful way.

For those who are truly seeking, Jesus will make himself known. “Those who seek will find...”

And one of the great truths of our faith is that Jesus is present each time we partake of Communion together.

Some traditions believe the bread miraculously becomes the body of Jesus, the wine his blood. Some say Communion is only a memorial to help us remember Jesus’ death for our salvation.

We believe it is a way to remember the sacrifice of our Lord, but it is far more than that. It is also a time when Jesus draws near to us as we partake the bread and juice. Even as we eat the bread and drink the wine, Jesus is with us.

Jesus said that “where two or three are gathered in my name there I am in the midst of them.” We gather in the name of Jesus each time we take Communion, and Jesus draws near to us. Even if you are at home today by yourself, you are united to all of us as you eat the bread and drink the wine. And in that fellowship, Jesus comes to us.

One more truth from our passage today. On many of the encounters with the Risen Lord, people had trouble recognizing Jesus. Mary thought he was the gardener at first. The two disciples on the way to Emmaus had no clue who they were walking with. Later Jesus will be on shore and the disciples do not recognize him.

Yet Thomas helps us know how we will always be able to recognize Jesus: by the nail prints in his hands. In the book of Revelation we see a picture of Jesus in heaven and he is described as a lamb that was slain (Rev. 5:12). The scars of his crucifixion are visible even in heaven. Thomas was the first one to pick up on this, that Jesus would be known by the scars.

Inspired by this thought, Francis J. Crosby wrote the following words in a song:

1. When my lifework is ended, and I cross the swelling tide,  
When the bright and glorious morning I shall see;  
I shall know my Redeemer when I reach the other side,  
And His smile will be the first to welcome me.
  - *Refrain:*  
I shall know Him, I shall know Him,  
And redeemed by His side I shall stand,  
I shall know Him, I shall know Him,  
By the print of the nails in His hand.

This morning I wonder, do you believe in Jesus today, as the Son of God who came to give his life to save us from our sin? Do you believe enough to surrender your life to him, allowing him to be your God? If not, what will it take for you to believe?