

Jesus' Appearances to the Disciples (John 20:19-29)

This is the first appearance of Jesus to his disciples (the original twelve without Judas Iscariot and Thomas), though there may have been others present. What would he say and talk about? What would be the topic of conversation and the subjects covered? It is this that John focuses upon: the subjects and topics discussed when Jesus first appeared to the disciples.

The disciples were hiding for fear of the Jews. They were behind closed doors, probably in the upper room of the same house where Jesus had met with them just a few days earlier. They were scared and fearful of the authorities who had vented so much wrath and vengeance upon the Lord. There was the imminent danger that they could be arrested and imprisoned or executed as revolutionaries just as Jesus had been.

Note that it was Sunday, the very day that Jesus had arisen, and it was nighttime. Luke tells us there were numerous reports that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Remember: the doors were locked. Suddenly, unexpectedly, Jesus stood before them—right in their

midst. He immediately began to discuss **three** subjects with them.

The **first** subject was the risen Lord himself. His presence was very real. His sudden appearance shook and frightened the disciples. They thought they were seeing a vision or a spirit (Luke 24:36-37). The first thing Jesus did was to prove that it was really him. He did this by doing **two** things. **First**, he greets them with the words, "Peace be with you!" (vv.19-20)? Using the greeting so familiar to the disciples would help to put them at ease. The fact that he spoke just as he had always spoke would give them some indication that it was really him and not just a vision or a spirit.

The **second** thing he did to prove that it was really him was that he showed them his wounds. This must have been a dramatic and touching moment, a moment that just exploded the minds of the disciples. Jesus probably moved around to each of them allowing each one to see the wounds. This convinced the disciples. They now knew for sure that they were not seeing a vision or a spirit, and they knew that this was his body, the body of

their wonderful Lord, the very same Jesus whom they had known before his crucifixion. The effect upon the disciples was unbelievable joy and amazement (Luke 24:41). Their spirits and attitudes were charged with joy and they were transformed from the lowest point of dejection to the highest point of triumphant conviction. They now knew what Jesus meant, that he was truly the Way to God, the Truth of God, and the Life of God.

In him was life—his words were *literally* true. He had meant exactly what he had said. They had just spiritualized his words, twisted them to mean what they had wanted. But now they knew when he said that he was going to die, he meant that he was going to die. And when he said that he was going to arise, he meant that he was going to rise.

The **second** subject Jesus was going to talk about was the Great Commission (v. 21). Let's look at **two** critical points of this second subject. **First**, there is one great qualification for being commissioned: receiving, possessing, and knowing the peace of Christ. Unless a

person has been reconciled to God by Christ, unless he has really made peace with God, he cannot represent God; he cannot represent God before the world.

The **second** critical point about the Great Commission is the great link between the mission of Christ and the **disciple**. The disciple is sent on the very same mission as Christ. God sent Jesus on a specific mission and Christ sends his disciple on the very same mission. What is the mission? We find the mission in **John 3:17**, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." So, God sent Christ and delegated all authority to him. Christ delegates no authority to the believer. He dispatches messengers. Which is what we can find in **2 Corinthians 5:20-21**, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God was making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

The **third** subject Jesus was going to talk about to the disciples was the Holy Spirit. Christ had just commissioned

his disciples. He then gave them power to carry out his orders. **First**, there was the imparting or giving of the Spirit in verse 22, which Jesus did by breathing on them and saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit". And **second**, was the giving of authority in verse 23, where Christ said, "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve was not with the disciples when Jesus came this first time. Why wasn't Thomas with the others when Jesus first appeared to them? Perhaps the fear of being arrested kept him away. Or perhaps he is like some people who would rather ponder things alone than talk it out with others. I'm one of those who would prefer not to be rushed and would like to think about things before deciding.

When the others told Thomas they had seen the Lord (v. 20:25), he was skeptical. He knew all about wishful

thinking and optical illusions. He wanted the proof that only touch and sight could give; otherwise, he would not believe.

Jesus appears again, his second appearance (vv. 24-29), and knowing Thomas' statement, deals sympathetically with the doubter by offering his hands and side, and urges him to "stop doubting and believe" (v. 27).

This is one of the great confessions in Scripture. Most likely dropping to his knees, Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" (v.28). Thomas now knew **five** great things. **First**, he knew that Jesus is truly the risen Lord. All that Jesus had said was true. **Second**, he knew that Jesus is both Lord and God, the Sovereign majesty of the universe. **Third**, he knew that Jesus is the One who has come to truly reveal God, and that he is the Mediator between God and man. **Fourth**, he knew that Jesus accepts no half-way commitment. Jesus expected to be his Lord and his God: "My Lord and my God!" And **fifth**, he knew that Jesus expected an open and public confession of him as Lord and God.

But Thomas had a great lesson for all men to learn? What is the lesson? The lesson is multi-pronged. **First**, the lesson is to believe without having to see evidences and proof. **Second**, to believe because of tenderness and Jesus' Appearances to the Disciples

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warmth. **Third**, to believe because of love and care and because of the need and nature of the human heart. **Fourth**, to believe because of the need for morality and godly character. **Fifth**, to believe because godly witnesses say so. **Sixth**, to believe because of the inner witness of the heart. And **seventh**, to believe because of the outer witness of nature.

Let me summarize those **seven** parts of Thomas' lesson into a succinct statement. Thomas' great lesson for all men is the person who believes without seeing will be far more blessed than those who demand proof (v. 29).

And now a final note about Thomas: tradition claims Thomas took the gospel to India, where he was martyred. The doubter came to believe via the resurrection of Christ. True belief has two characteristics: a conviction about who Jesus is and a commitment to him in everyday living. Are you convicted

of who Jesus is? Have you made a commitment to follow him? How will that look in your everyday life?

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What are some of the **lessons** we can learn about this Scripture reading from John?

The promise of this text is that **Jesus cannot be stopped by our locked doors**. Jesus comes to us as he came to his first disciples, right in the midst of their fear, pain, doubt, and confusion. He comes speaking peace, breathing into our anxious lives the breath of the Holy Spirit. What's more, is he keeps showing up. And, of course, Thomas' great lesson for all men is the person who believes without seeing will be far more blessed than those who demand proof.

Please bow your heads as I pray.

Lord Jesus, as you appeared to your disciples in their fear and doubt, I pray that you would appear to me in my moments of uncertainty. May your peace which surpasses all understanding, fill my heart and calm my anxieties. Help me to trust in your presence, even when I

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cannot see you, and to know that your love and grace are always available to me. Lord, I confess that like Thomas, I sometimes struggle with doubt. I pray that I may have the courage to seek you, even when my faith feels weak. Help me see your wounds and to recognize your presence in my life. May I be able to say, "My Lord and my God," not just with my mouth, but with my heart. As you breathed on your disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit," I pray that you would breath into me your Holy Spirit. May your Spirit guide my thoughts, empower my actions, and fill me with your peace. Help me to be a vessel of your love and grace, and to share your message of hope with others. In the name of your Son and our Savior, **Amen.**