

Beloved congregation,

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ was, for almost all his followers, an amazing event which they had all grasped at least something of by the end of that first day. By the time the sun was down, even the travellers that were on the way to Emmaus had been convinced of it. They had seen the Lord, and having returned to Jerusalem, the whole group rejoiced together at what they had seen and heard that day. Then to cap it all off, Jesus himself stood in their midst and said, peace be unto you. He spoke words of encouragement, words of commission, as we read in verses 22 and 23. And he showed them his wounds. His words were balm for their needy souls, words they so needed, words that one of them especially needed, but he was not there.

Thomas. Thomas was absent when Jesus first appeared to the group of disciples gathered together, and no, the Lord didn't go see Thomas by himself. Thomas, by his absence, missed the blessing of God and the gathering of his people. He missed a visit from his risen Lord. Let me be blunt, skipping church robs you of a blessing. Each time the congregation gathers to hear the word, we must gather with the expectation that the Lord Jesus himself gathers with his church and will bless. If you're not here, then you miss, as it were, a visit from the risen Lord. Some people say, well, I can go for a walk in the mountains or sit by a lake and get inspiration for all my spiritual needs. It's not true.

The Lord is pleased to work through his ordained means and the chief means he uses for the building up of faith and the edifying of saints and the conversion of sinners is the preaching of the word. That's not something that I made up. This is the way God has ordained it. And so this is what we do. This is why we have a seminary and send forth preachers. In the worship service, the Lord speaks through his spirit.

He's never absent. Therefore, let us not be absent either without good reason. There's reasons to be home if you're sick or with a sick one. Works of necessity, we can go through all of that, but you know what I mean? To be here when you can be. Church isn't optional. What a blessing. What a blessing we see for Thomas that when he is present and the Lord again appears. What a blessed moment in his life. Let's consider it this morning under the theme,

## **Be Not Faithless, But Believing.**

We'll see first, the doubts Thomas held, second, the words Jesus spoke, and third, the faith God gave.

First then, the doubts Thomas held. Before we focus on these doubts, we need to say that Thomas, while he had these doubts, Thomas was a believer. He had placed his trust in the Lord Jesus for his salvation, and we can see that in different ways in the Gospels. Let me just give you one example.

That time in John 14 when Jesus said, I go away, where I'm going you know and the way you know. Remember Thomas? He said, Lord, going away? Where? Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way? What does that show you about Thomas?

It shows you that Thomas loved the Lord Jesus. In fact, he was very apprehensive that he might not be able to know the way to Jesus once he's gone. He couldn't bear the thought of being apart from Jesus. It shows his love for Jesus, his need for Jesus.

And yet we find in this believer's life this severe bout of doubt. It might be true that Thomas was especially disposed to feelings of gloom and times of doubt. Remember that time when he said, let us also go up to Jerusalem with him and die with him. He seems to be a little pessimistic, there are certainly people like that in life, but all of that aside, it is also true that many of God's people, regardless of their natural disposition, can relate to Thomas in some way, at least at some points in their lives.

Here's Thomas, he's having a hard time. He's very down. His Lord had been crucified, had been laid into the grave, and it's like Thomas' faith was in a grave too. And all he could see was gloom. He was brooding, in his feelings of despair. He was festering in his heart. The sun was gone. And there was Thomas.

And even after the other disciples had seen the Lord, and when at some point during that week we read about it, they told Thomas all about it, testifying of Jesus' resurrection to him, even then he didn't believe them. You can just imagine them excitedly telling him,

Thomas, we saw the Lord. We even touched him, we saw his wounds.

Thomas, you don't have to doubt about it anymore. It's fine, all is well.

Just believe us, because we know it's true.

Nothing could persuade Thomas to believe. He couldn't do it. He didn't trust their testimony. He would have loved it if it was true, but his pessimism couldn't see through it. He didn't want to be disappointed yet again. Maybe he felt a little upset or jealous that they claimed to have this vision and he didn't get it. Maybe as a form of self-preservation, a safe place where at least he knew he was sheltered from further gloom and hurt, it would just stay where he was. Not dare to hope. What these, his colleagues, were talking about could be true. In fact, for Thomas, only one witness would be sufficient, and that was himself.

Notice the first person singular in what he says. In verse 25, except **\*\*I\*\*** shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put **\*\*my\*\*** finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hands into his side, I will not believe. He doesn't even say, okay, I'll believe if I see him. He says, except I do all these things, I will not believe. He puts it negatively.

You ever been there? I have.

You ever been afflicted by doubt when faith is assaulted? It often happens you begin to doubt and struggle. You spiral down, you're stuck.

Even though you know objectively that whatever it is you're doubting about is no hindrance to the Lord at all, yet you can have such a conflict within yourself because of your circumstances that are so real, or your temptations that are so heated, or your trials that are so painful, or whatever it is you face.

And the root for it is yes, unbelief, lack of faith. Lack of trust, lack of committing all things to the Lord, wanting to have everything spiritually lined up, and to walk by sight.

What is the opposite of faith? Someone might say unbelief, and that would be true. But isn't another good word for the opposite of faith, sight? As you evaluate your doubts and the reasons for your struggles to trust God fully, is it not so often because what you really want to have is sight? Well, as one man wrote, faith that needs to see is not faith. As Paul said in Romans, what a man sees, what does he yet hope for? But now we see not. And so we are called to believe. We walk by faith, Paul tells the Corinthians, not by sight.

Thomas' root spiritual problem was that he had set aside the word of God and the words of Jesus and replaced them with his own ideas, his own thinking, his own reasoning. His faith had begun to shift, no longer grounded in what God had said or what God was saying to him, to the other disciples. What had God said?

In fact, Jesus himself, as God, had said, I'm going to rise again. Thomas heard him. And the third day, I will rise again. The disciples had said, he rose again. We've seen him. Those words should have been enough for Thomas. Faith would have said, yes, okay, it makes sense. The Lord has himself said this would happen, and now I'm seeing the fruits of that where faith, in fact, would have expected nothing short of a resurrection. But Thomas' faith had shifted to sight. Operating only by what he could see, Thomas had nothing to go by. And rather than trust in God's word, he only wanted to retreat to what he could independently verify. Anything else wasn't good enough.

And this is always very dangerous spiritually when you stop taking God at his word and instead operate only on what you can see and verify and confirm that is dangerous. Why? Because you're leaning on yourself. You're not leaning on God anymore. Then your heart is no longer settled on the word that God has spoken. It betrays mistrust and suspicion towards your faithful, sure God, who when he speaks, he speaks truth.

When he promises, he will also keep that promise. And the object of your faith shifts from him, to the conditions you have set for believing. then your own qualifications for the exercise of faith are the benchmark or the object of faith. Maybe in your spiritual life, you're looking for something more. And maybe you say, well, I have precedent for this.

There were people in my past who had great experiences spiritually that they could speak of, and I can speak of no such thing. My friend, are you putting those experiences in the place of the object of faith, the Lord and his word?

Is the desire, the apparent felt lack of or absence of this experience going to replace the Lord? I would say look to the Lord and trust in his word and the experience will come, not the other way around. It's actually idolatry, isn't it, when we place our confidence in other things other than God?

When in doubt and temptation, Psalter 202, I rest, Lord, in Thee. That's what we must say.

The foundation of faith, the key to spiritual confidence and certainty and assurance doesn't lie in our experience or in what we can see, but the foundation of faith, the key to spiritual confidence and certainty and assurance lies squarely and only in what God has said. His Word. Let that be the object of faith.

So, dear one, as we watch Thomas, let us learn from his mistake to cling to the Lord in spite of what our circumstances, our natural disposition, or our greatest fears may be

telling us. It is then when faith is exercised that God is honored and the Lord will follow with His blessing. Sometimes we, like Thomas,

We also need the Lord to come and speak to us with both loving admonition and in gracious condescension and wisdom, which we see him doing in our second point, in the words Jesus spoke. In verse 26, it's a week later and the disciples are again gathered and this time Thomas is with them.

What a wonderful thing to see that at least Thomas is not at home this time. He's there. Maybe he's heard all the excitement and he's seen the relief and the joy on the faces of his colleagues and he's determined that the very least thing he can do is to be there with them. Well, that's a good first step, isn't it? He's no longer forsaking the assembling of themselves together, as Paul or the author to the Hebrews would later write. He's there. And while they're there, the doors again are shut. But again, Jesus appears in the midst. There they are. All of a sudden, there Jesus is. Appearing as he can and did, in his glorified body, where he would.

And he says the same words as last time, peace be unto you, at the end of verse 26.

What does it mean, peace be unto you? Well, it's not merely a wish, it's a bestowal of peace. The peace he had merited for them, peace with God, peace of conscience, peace among themselves, peace that flows from him, his peace, that passeth all understanding to keep their hearts and minds by Christ Jesus. He gives this peace to them.

And it was just what Thomas needed in his unrest, sitting there no doubt still with so much gloominess. He had waited already for days and day after day had gone by, and yet there had been nothing. There was no appearance of the Lord, no sight or sound of him. And his unbelief continued to eat away at him. His soul was restless. And then to hear that word, peace. Peace be unto you. It's just what he needed.

But the Lord is speaking that not only to him, but to all of them generally. But now the Lord, you can picture him, he turns to Thomas specifically, showing that he knows exactly where Thomas is at, knows exactly what Thomas is thinking, knows exactly what Thomas needs. And he shows that also in the very fact that he appears physically. You know, the Lord could have appeared only by way of voice.

He could have spoken in that room. He said, Thomas, it is me. I am alive forevermore." Or he could have sent an angel to appear to them and to say, your Lord and Saviour lives, and Thomas, you need to believe it too. That would have been enough, wouldn't it have been?

He could have done that, but in his wisdom he knows this is how I will deal with Thomas, and so he does so much more. He shows himself standing there, turning to Thomas, speaking to him with words that blast through all his unbelief. and clear away all his objections and expose his unbelief.

Thomas, reach hither thy finger and behold my hands and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side. Oh, he comes for his lost sheep and with all the care of the good shepherd, graciously stooping to meet Thomas right in his present need.

This teaches us something about the character of the Lord. He is sensitive to and concerned about weakness of faith in his people. He doesn't grow impatient with you when you're weak of faith. He doesn't give up on you, he doesn't abandon you. In compassion, he ministers to you, to your weak faltering faith. Isn't that encouraging? This is who the Lord is.

Maybe you feel your faith is weak and faltering, even this very day you feel low. Maybe you feel unable to see through the situation that you find yourself in. Maybe you see so little on the horizon. No future, no hope. You wonder how things will turn out in your life. Maybe you have little to live for.

Maybe people are abandoning you or you're struggling with family and you have so many reasons to doubt God and to doubt whether he's even at work in your life and maybe you're dejected because of things happening in your family life or you're struggling because you feel distant and cold spiritually.

Maybe your friendships aren't what they used to be and things have changed and you're struggling with that. Maybe a sibling has betrayed you or hurt you. Maybe you feel dejected and lonely or left out.

Maybe you feel your lot in life is so much worse than that of others to know how easy it is to compare. Comparison is indeed the thief of joy. And the next thing you know, you're in Thomas's seat. And you're saying things like Thomas. Maybe you're grumbling.

He doesn't care about me. He only cares about others. God's eye is not on me. His favour is not towards me. And then you remember your sins and all your failures in your own life. And if you're honest, you realize you don't deserve any more, anything at all. But that leads to even more despondence, and the cycle just continues, and pretty soon you can hardly function.

My friend, look up. Yes, look into the word and see the Lord Jesus here appearing to Thomas and speaking to him and throwing gently, lovingly, compassionately, and wisely Thomas' very words back at him.

Maybe you've had it, someone repeats at you what you just said and you realize how silly it sounded.

Coming from the Lord Jesus, those same words that you speak, Thomas, you sound so foolish. You realize what I'm saying doesn't actually make sense. And in that way, the Lord Jesus' words to Thomas are very shepherdly, very pastoral.

They reach out to Thomas, but they also correct him. Put your finger into my nail-pierced hands and thrust your hand into my side. It's a direct response and rebuke to what Thomas had said, except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails. And put my finger into the print of his nails and thrust my hand into his side. I will not believe.

The very way Jesus says this, forces Thomas to evaluate his own words of unbelief.

And they corner him in his foolish unbelief, his sinful unbelief. They convict him. But more than that, they drive away his unbelief and doubts. so that he would no longer be faithless,

but believing. That's what Jesus adds, and be not faithless, but believing. Don't be faithless, don't be unbelieving, don't be filled with unbelief. Instead, trust.

The Lord calls to faith.

That was the end goal of our Lord's rebuke. He chastens not to chasten but to restore. He rebukes Thomas to restore him to the exercise of faith. He still does that today. He still chastens his wayward unbelieving people to revive true faith. And you will confront your unbelief, dear one.

He will deal firmly and sensitively and wisely with you, with Thomas, and with you today. He hears and knows your complaints, your struggles, your frustration, your unwillingness to submit under his providences. He's compassionate. He knows all your needs. He remembers you are dust. He knows your frame. Notice how condescending he is to Thomas, that he actually grants him the thing he wanted so bad in order to believe.

Does that mean he didn't need faith in Thomas? No. The Lord does give Thomas faith. We see that in our third point. Thomas responds, not by rushing forward and touching the Lord, but by speaking back. The words of faith, my Lord and my God. And now what you kind of see here is, you have all these people in the room, the disciples and Thomas, and Thomas is lagging way behind. And it's like in these words, he leapfrogs over them, now he's ahead in his faith. John would later say in a few days on the boat, it is the Lord. But Thomas here goes much further than any of those disciples. His faith swings from one end of doubt all the way to faith. More than just believing that Jesus is alive, he appropriates Jesus to himself.

He is the Lord, yes. But more than that, Thomas says, he's my Lord. He's my God.

Thomas could appropriate, by grace, the person and work of Jesus Christ to his own soul. He was ashamed, surely, but he was also overwhelmed at the realization of all the blessings of salvation that were his through this Saviour. What happened?

How did this happen that Thomas suddenly goes from this Terrible doubt to this wonderful self-appropriating faith? The only one answer is that the Lord God himself granted this faith to Thomas. That's why we don't leave this passage and say, well, Thomas was so much better in the end than the others.

Who are you and who am I? We are but recipients of the things God gives. Isn't that true? The very fact that you're here is a gift from God. When you were born to your parents, they saw you as a gift. Your life is a gift. Everything you have in life is a gift. What do we have, Paul asks the Corinthians, that we have not received?

So same with saving faith. Trusting in the Lord is a gift. Faith that Thomas now had that meant he no longer needed to put his finger onto the Lord's hand or into his side. We don't read that Thomas ever did that. He didn't say, my Lord and my God, but let me just check. No, that was gone.

The conditions that we have for believing, you say, I will only go if this, or I will only go if that, and I will only do this, I will only obey. I can only, the Lord has to show me A, B, C, D. But then the Lord comes with his word, and all your ABCs of your conditions fall away. They look silly before him. Let's go back to that example of a broken friendship. Maybe you

say, I'll only forgive this person if they first come to me and apologize, and acknowledge how they might have wronged me.

And the Lord Jesus comes to you, as it were, through his word and says, take your finger and touch the print of my nails, the nail print on my hands. Put your hand into my wounded side. You know how appropriate this word to Thomas is for you and me? Because when you take your hand and you put it near his wounded side, It's a match. Because your hands and mine have blood on them. His blood. It's your finger and mine, your hand and mine that have done so much grief to him.

Where does that leave you before others? It leaves you realizing the problem probably isn't them, but me. Me and my lack of forgiveness, me and my stubborn pride. And when the Lord shows you who you are, then he also shows you who he is, because if he's the one who has forgiven you your grievous sins against others, can you not freely forgive others in your life? Or rather, if he's the one who has forgiven you your grievous sins against him, that's what I meant to say. Him. Can you not freely forgive others? Freely you've received, freely give, the apostle says.

When you see more of him and more of yourself by the light of him, then your conditions fall away. Thomas speaks words of faith, and faith triumphs, and the dark clouds disappear. Then we see in the last verse the Lord's compassion and care, not just for Thomas, but for all his sheep. He saw far beyond Thomas. He knew this would be written and recorded for our learning, for our instruction, and so he adds these words. Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed.

Blessed are those that have not seen and yet believe. We're not going to see the Lord Jesus in this life. But Jesus is saying that doesn't matter. That doesn't hinder faith. Faith comes not by seeing, but by hearing the word of God. The apostles confirm over and over that although they saw the Lord, like Peter says on the Mount of Transfiguration, in such glory, Peter says that's nothing. For we have a more sure word of prophecy, the very scriptures God has given, which should be enough to eradicate all doubt and to cast away our objections. For the Lord has said, and if he has said, it shall be no matter what.

Jesus is teaching here the only sure basis for believing, for faith through all time, and for all people, the Word of God, the revelation of God in the Bible. Blessed are they who have believed on the basis of what God has spoken, though they have not seen.

If the life of faith is a struggle for you, you're not alone. God's people have their difficulties. Look to the Lord and look to his word.

He will strengthen you. Maybe you lament the struggle.

You're looking everywhere to find faith like Thomas, but you forget the most logical place, that word. We're to be dependent on the word of God. It's not just a tool for us to use when we need it. We're to be in the word. The Lord will strengthen you through his word. Seek it in the Bible. Seek strengthened faith in the word of God. Satan may be strong and you may be unworthy or desolate or fear the worst, but none of that matters. To the word, you must go. Search the scriptures.

If Thomas had done that, how different it would have turned out for him. If he would have thought back on not only the Old Testament prophecies and the Psalms that speak of the

rising again of the Lord's servant, but also the very words of Jesus to him, that he would rise again. He would have had a lot less of a struggle of it. Yes, actually, no struggle at all.

The same is true for you and me. When we take up the word and we pray that God would lay the truths of that word as comforts upon our souls, then you feel the spiritual pendulum begin to swing from doubt to faith. Your spiritual barometer begins to rise. And if you're here this evening and you've never believed and your spiritual barometer is zero, it's the same for you. You need faith because without faith it is impossible to please God and you'll perish forever without it.

How can you get it? You can never get it by trying to work it up yourself. The Word is nigh thee. Turn to that Word. It will increase your faith. It will give you faith. The Lord will give you faith through the means of His Word by His Spirit. Ask the Lord to open your eyes by His Spirit. to see Christ, the risen Saviour, by faith.

Then You can say with Lord's Day 7, not only to others, but to me also. The remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits. To me also. so that you can say with Thomas, my Lord and my God, and be not faithless, but believing. Amen.