

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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John 20:24-31 – Thomas' Encounter With The Risen Christ

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“After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, ‘Peace to you.’²⁷ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.’²⁸ Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’²⁹ Jesus said to him, ‘Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.’³⁰ Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;³¹ but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”

John 20:26-31

Once again, we have an incident reported only in John’s gospel. It probably would have been a bit embarrassing for Thomas to have had to deal with this notoriety during his lifetime. Possibly for that reason, and for the sake of brevity, the other gospel writers make no mention of Thomas’ doubt, or resistance to faith, which John chooses to share with us here. Thomas went on from this time of doubt to become a bold evangelist, bringing the message of his Lord and his God to India, where he bravely faced torture and martyrdom for his faith (cf. 11:16).

“But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus...” (20:24) -- This is the second time John refers to Thomas as “Didymus” (cf. 11:16). “Thomas” would be the Hebrew name, and “Didymus” the Greek equivalent. Both names mean “Twin”, indicating that he had another sibling, of which we know nothing. In a day when surnames were not commonly used, being a twin was an unusual thing, providing an easy way to identify someone. “...was not with them when Jesus came.” -- There is an apparent difficulty with this statement and Luke 24:33, where the disciples returning from Emmaus, “found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them”. Is this a contradiction? Does this call into question the accuracy of Luke’s research and reporting? Not necessarily. Luke’s track record of relating with accuracy and detail the events he reports is amazingly precise in those bits of information which he passes along to us. It is important to remember, however, that the purpose of the gospel accounts was *not* to give a detailed, event-by-event account, according to our 21st century standards. The Good News was first and foremost a proclamation of glad tidings, not a detailed historical treatise. One of the most obvious characteristics of the synoptic gospels is that Matthew and Luke definitely compress some of the details recorded in Mark. Abbreviation and abridgment of detail were not uncommon, in order to tailor the writing or storytelling to the author’s purpose and audience. Hence, in accordance with commonly accepted practice of their day, the gospel writers would leave out details, in order to briefly tell their story in a way that suited their purpose. They did not fictionalize, or create detail that was not true to what actually happened. They merely left out detail, compressing the account to suit the end they had in mind. (Cf. Matt. 8:28-34; Mk. 5:1-20). This is one of the valuable features of having several different sources. We can cross-check the sources to get a clearer picture of what actually happened. “...was not with them when Jesus came.” -- He had missed not only the resurrection appearance, but also the commissioning by the Lord.

“So the other disciples were saying to him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’” (vs. 25) -- The other disciples reported to Thomas what they had experienced. “But he said, ‘Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.’” -- Thomas was not going to simply accept the testimony of the others. Jesus was going to have to show Himself to him, in order for him to be convinced. His statement was very emphatic in the Greek, “If ever I do not see... not never will I believe”. He had decided upon some very specific tests to determine if this was a hoax, or a real resurrection appearance. Note, again, that in Thomas’ mind the idea of resurrection was nonsensical if the body of Jesus, ...the very same body which died on the cross..., was not the body that would appear to him. He was requiring tangible, verifiable evidence that this person who appeared to the others was in fact the risen Christ, not someone simply playing on their emotions. Could it be that he was a little miffed that Jesus would appear to others, but not to him? After all, He had personally appeared to Peter. And the two on the road to Emmaus were not even among the twelve, and Jesus walked with them for some hours. He even appeared to women, ...but not to Thomas, one of His own twelve chosen disciples? Could it be that the emphatic nature of Thomas’ words grew out of feeling forgotten and overlooked, rather than intellectual skepticism alone? Interestingly, that is often the case with those who stubbornly resist the evidence for Christ’s resurrection. There is often an emotional hurt, or a pride, which keeps them from truly having an open mind about this issue. Thus, they may say that there is not enough evidence, ...while at the same time they are not honestly investigating the evidence which is available. They keep an investigation of this reality at arm’s length, because they do not want it to be true.

“After eight days...” (vs. 26) -- Thomas had over a week to stew about this, and was apparently as unbending as ever. **“His disciples were again inside, and Thomas was with them.”** -- Setting the stage for Jesus’ appearance. **“Jesus came, the doors having been shut [locked], and stood in their midst and said, ‘Peace be with you.’”** -- Thomas is getting a replay of the experience of the previous week. Clearly, Jesus did not clandestinely sneak into the room, He just appeared in their midst, when Thomas and the others knew that the doors were shut and locked. The Greek is very vivid here. In vs. 19, the description of Jesus’ appearance on the previous week, John had used the past tense, “Jesus came and stood in their midst”. Here, John uses the present tense, “Jesus comes”, to dramatically pull us into the experience. The use of the historical present is used again in vs. 27 and 29, when Jesus addresses Thomas.

“Then He said to Thomas...” (vs. 27) -- Lit., “He says to Thomas”. **“Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side...”** -- Jesus was well aware of Thomas’ words, spoken over a week before. **Jesus invited Thomas to inspect His wounds, so as to remove all doubt.** At this point, the resurrection body of Jesus still bore the marks of the crucifixion. In the book of Revelation, also written by John, the appearance of Jesus is greatly transformed. Whether He still carries the scars is not clear. Unlike injuries, deformities and the infirmities of old age, which will undoubtedly be absent from our resurrected bodies, these scars remain, so that there can be no question that this is Christ Jesus. The wounds that were unfairly and cruelly inflicted upon the Son of Man are now a testimony of love and victory. **“...and do not be unbelieving, but believing.”** -- The word translated as “believing” is an adjective, meaning “faithful, trustworthy, reliable, or believing”. **Jesus’ words were not only about Thomas’ need to come to faith, but also his obligation to fulfill the responsibility he had been trained for as an apostle.**

“Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and My God!’” (vs. 28) -- This was not just an exclamation, words uttered at the shock of suddenly seeing a risen dead man. The word, “answered”, implies a reasoned response, and John specifically tells us that Thomas’ words were directed to Jesus. **Doubting Thomas is the first to actually call Jesus “My God”.** Being a Jew, raised with a strong emphasis on a strict and exclusive monotheism, this was a significant statement to make. The heart of Judaism, encapsulated in the *shema* (Deut. 6:4) is that Yahweh is one. There were no other gods *before* Him, there will be none *after* Him, in fact, there are none *besides* Him (Deut. 4:32-40; Isa. 43:10,11; 44:6,8; 45:5,6,14,18,21,22; 46:9). Furthermore, He is a jealous God, and will not share His glory with anyone (Ex. 20:6; Isa. 42:8; 48:11). Yet, **Jesus claimed to be God, seven times associating Himself with titles that belonged only to God** (6:35; 8:12; 10:7-9,11; 11:25,26; 14:6; 15:1), **and seven more times speaking of Himself as the “I am”, a clear reference to identification with Yahweh** (4:26; 6:20; 8:24,28,58; 13:19; 18:5-8). In His teachings **He was claiming that He would do things that were ascribed to God (...and did them!) and said He was to receive glory and honor that belonged only to God** (e.g., 5:17-29; 10:25-38; 14:8-14). Having heard and seen all these things, and having witnessed the crucifixion, and now confronted with the reality of the resurrection, **Thomas draws the conclusion consistent with all of the evidence, namely that Jesus was not only the Master, He was somehow also God Himself, come in human flesh.** This is the same conclusion to which John also came, and was used as the introductory statement of this gospel (1:1). **It has been the purpose of this writing to assemble the evidence to bring us to this same conclusion**, expressed by the wavering doubter, as he was confronted with the irrefutable, living Evidence Himself.

“Jesus said to him, ‘Because you have seen Me, have you believed?’” (vs. 29) -- That was clearly the case with Thomas. It took clear, convincing, tangible proof for Thomas to accept the Good News, and yield his allegiance. **“Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.”** – Thomas’ stubborn withholding of trust without compelling evidence was a lesser faith than that of those who would hear and give their trust without a direct appearance of Jesus. **It is important to note that most of the earliest disciples were privileged to experience an encounter with the risen Jesus.** Certainly all the other ten apostles had, as would the brothers of Jesus, and even a group of 500 (I Cor. 15:5-9). Jesus’ point was that Thomas had more than enough evidence to choose to trust in Him, even before this personal interview. **A heart that was more open and pliable is of greater value than one who must be compelled to yield** (Psa. 32:9). **God is looking for those who are responsive.**

“Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book...” (vs. 30) -- It is evident in numerous places that **Jesus was performing many, many more miracles than what we have recorded** in John, or in the other gospels combined. **Those selected by the authors were chosen because they were unusually memorable, or to fulfill a particular purpose that the author had in mind.** The phrase “in the presence of the disciples” is included to remind the reader that **there were eyewitnesses to these events**. They did not simply grow out of over-emotionalism, or legend. They were real, space-time events which were observed and verified by others. **“...but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ...”** (vs. 31) -- John reveals to us his purpose. **“...and that believing you may have life in His name.”** -- Knowledge is *not* enough. Jesus came to bring *life* (Jn. 10:10). Consequently, *life* is what we should be looking for.