

## SECOND CHANCES

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**Scripture:** John 11, John 14, John 20

As we go past Easter and head into the remaining days that we have in front of us, it seems a little bit like coming down from the mountain top. We enjoyed the Resurrection Day, celebrated the glory of the resurrection many thousands of years ago, that Jesus broke through the tomb and we celebrate the life that we have in Him. And we sang the beautiful song, "He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today." But when we come to the next Sunday, it's almost like coming down from the mountain top to the plains. We look for the exciting, and yet, it's mundane, it is the ordinary. I think that God allows us these mountain top experiences as a lovely gift for each one of us.

But the truth is that life is lived in the plains. Remember the transfiguration of Jesus, where Peter, James and John were with Him. They were so taken up by this whole extraordinary scene that they witnessed, that Peter said, "Lord, let us make three tabernacles for each of you and immortalize this." That's where he wanted to stay. Yet, Jesus didn't even answer him. And when they came down, they found reality, and that reality was the demon-possessed boy whom the disciples couldn't help. They suddenly realized that mountain top experiences are there, but they are not the norm. They are really the exception. Living in the plains, in the valleys is actually the norm.

Then we remember Elijah on Mount Carmel taking on the 450 priests of Baal, and the 400 priests of Asherah, and how he stood there and triumphantly brought down fire after he had challenged them saying, "If the Lord is God, worship Him; and if not, worship Baal." But then we read that when Jezebel heard what had happened, she said, "I will get him." And Elijah turned and ran.

The mountain top and then the valley. I think, in a sense, that's where we are today, one week after Easter. After the resurrection high, we're back to a normal Sunday where we just have to look at what's going on in our own lives, look at scripture and see how scripture informs us about the things that we need to get on with.

So, let's look at the gospel writers. How did they respond after the resurrection? When we look at Matthew, we see that after the initial meeting of Jesus with the disciples and the ladies, the only thing that He talks about is the Great Commission.

*"Go ye into all the world, preaching the gospel, baptizing them, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded. Lo I am with you always even to the end of the age."*

That's the conclusion of Matthew's gospel.

In Mark's gospel, He kind of repeats the commission and then He also talks about signs and wonders that will accompany those who believe.

In Luke's gospel, he gives us that little narrative about the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, walking away from Jerusalem. Jesus meets them and they talked. They go back to the disciples and tell them what happened. Then we see that Jesus shows up in that room and He shows them His hands and His side, and then He asks them for something to eat. He explains the scriptures. And then we read about His ascension into heaven.

Those are the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. John continues on when he talks about the meeting of the disciples. He goes on to talk about how Jesus breathed on them the Holy Spirit and said something about forgiveness, and that those whom you forgive will be forgiven. Then he

deals with the unbelief of Thomas. Eight days later, Thomas too believes when Jesus says, "Put your fingers in My hands and My side. Don't be unbelieving, but believing." Then John also gives us a rationale for the gospel in vs. 31. He says, "These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, or the Messiah, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in His name." That's how John sums up. He says that all of these things have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the One that you have been waiting for. He is Jesus, the Son of God, and that you may have life in His name. then he ends with that famous passage of Jesus dealing with Peter. "Do you love me?"

But today, I want to make our way back to Thomas, because I think we have some unfinished business with him. I would like to look at the three occurrences that we have of Thomas and put them together and see what we can learn about this disciple.

### **John 11**

It's the story of Lazarus and how news comes that he is sick, and then that he's dead. Jesus still waits two days. Then He says, "Let us go. Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go that I may awaken him out of sleep." The disciples said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Then He says, "Let us go to Judea," and they remind Him, "The people there were trying to stone You, and now You want to go back?" And Jesus says, "No, I must go because Lazarus has to be woken up." Then Jesus says to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. I'm glad for your sakes, that I was not there; so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Then Thomas says to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him." You look at that statement and it seems like there's a bit of skepticism or cynicism there, but I don't want to look too much into that because then I'm reading into something that's not there. Let's just take what he said at face value: "Let us also go so that we may die with Him." Thomas wasn't saying, "Okay, forget it, guys. You all go. I'm not going." He was saying, "If Jesus is going, then let's all go. If Jesus is going to die, let's all die with Him."

As I think about that, I think you know when Peter said that, we think a little differently. Because when Jesus talked about His death, Peter said, "No, I will die for you." And yet, here is Thomas with the same sense of loyalty: "I left everything to follow You, and now I really don't understand why You need to go back to a place where they were trying to kill You. But hey, I'm going back. If You're going to die, come on guys, let's all go and die with Him." There was no deserting Jesus. There was no question of disagreeing: "I'm staying here. Please explain." Nothing. "Let's go. If You're going to go and it ends up in death, I'm coming along, and guys, you come along too." There was a sense of deep loyalty even though he didn't understand why Jesus would want to go back to a place where they were trying to kill Him.

### **John 14**

Jesus is saying, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; but I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going." Thomas butts in at that point and he says to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?"

Then Jesus comes back with that famous statement, and we very rarely realize that that statement was predicated by Thomas' question. Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father but through Me."

That wonderful statement, that 'I Am' statement came in because of Thomas who was saying: Wait a minute Lord, I don't understand. You are talking about all these mansions that are there, that You are going to be with the Father, You're preparing a place for us. And then You say, 'Where I am, there you may be also.' So that we can be where You are. And You end by saying, 'And you know the way where I'm going,' but we don't. clarify for me what you're saying. I need to understand this.

Thinking about this, I thought that very often we hear things that we don't understand, but we don't question it. We think: Okay. Maybe there's some truth in it. Maybe it'll dawn on me later. Maybe I'm not where Jesus is, and maybe I'd be a fool if I question it. And so, I let it go. But Thomas wasn't even thinking like that: Wait a minute! I didn't understand it. You're saying that we know the way. But we don't know the way. Please clarify for me.

And out of that request for clarification, came this beautiful statement that Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. if you want to come to the Father, you come through Me." What a profound statement! It is through Jesus that we are able to reach God. Yet, it came because Thomas asked the question – I don't understand.

So, we see a disciple who is loyal to the core; we see a disciple who will not just act like he's understanding things but asks for clarification so that the truth can become truth in his own life.

### **John 20**

Jesus meets the disciples again eight days after the Resurrection. He comes in and Thomas now is with the disciples in the room. Jesus says 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." We do not know whether Thomas actually did it, because the next words that we read here are Thomas saying, "My Lord and my God."

We often look at this passage and we think: Yeah! Good old Thomas the doubter. Yet, the truth is that what he asked that Jesus would do for him was exactly what Jesus did for the disciples a week back. We are told that Jesus came to the disciples and He told them, "Put your hands in My hands, and your hands in My side." Thomas' response, when the disciples told him that they met Jesus, was, "Unless I do the same thing, I will not believe." And Jesus gives him the opportunity to do that very same thing. His response then is, "My Lord and my God."

I love the song by Alfred Ackley, that we just sang – 'He Lives', because it asks the question: You ask me how I know He lives, he lives within my heart.

Loyalty, clarification and proof were the three things that almost characterized Thomas. **I want proof.** And our proof today is that He lives within our hearts. That's the proof; at least it should be – that our lives are so diametrically opposite from before He came to live, that it is enough proof for people who see us to be able to recognize that there is a huge change. Last week we looked at what the resurrection meant. The fact that the resurrected Jesus, the same power that rose Jesus, is in your heart and mine, enabling us to live a victorious life.

But I think there's a deeper point that we can draw here, church, if we can maybe leave Thomas to one side – because when we think of Thomas, the word doubter is attached to him.

Don't be a doubting Thomas

Rest fully in His promise.

Why worry, worry, worry, worry, when you can pray?

This is the old chorus that we used to sing many years ago. Think of Thomas, and doubt is added on.

We do the same for many people. When we think of David, we think of adultery and we forget what a great king he was, what a wise person, what a man after God's heart, in spite of that sin. And yet, adultery, or Bathsheba, is how sometimes we lump David with. Or take Peter – for all that he did in terms of following Jesus, and in terms of writing those brilliant letters, we still think of Peter and denial. Jacob – when we think of him, cheater, birthright. That's our human tendency, to not latch on to the good things that people do but to focus on the bad or on the mistakes or the one time that they may have erred.

Shakespeare put it well when he said, "The evil that men do lives after them, and the good is oft interred with their bones." The evil lives on, the good buried with them. Yet, when we see Thomas, the doubting Thomas – tradition has it that 25 years after all this happened, he came to India in 58 AD, spread the gospel, was martyred according to tradition in Little Mount in Chennai. Those of you who have been there can see all the stories of him there. I visited there and saw the cave; in fact, went down into that cave where it seems he used to spend hours and hours in prayer. A man who was dubbed as a doubter, but was a tremendous evangelist, who took the gospel all the way to India.

### **1. Release**

As we look at our own lives and we think about people who have crossed us, people who have let us down, people who have erred, sinned in some way, something that has just turned us off them. Every time after that, the lens that we look through has branded them. We have boxed them, never given them another chance, never looked at the things that they have done beyond it – whether they asked forgiveness, the recanted, they changed their position, they turned around, and all of that doesn't matter. In our mind, we've branded them. We always look at them like that. maybe we tell others too about the way we feel about that person.

I wonder whether we can give that person another chance just as Jesus did for Thomas. I love the fact that Jesus came back. He came back to Thomas and He dealt with Thomas. I wonder whether we too, today can maybe dredge up some of the people who we don't like, we don't care, we don't deal with, because of something they did, and ask the question: What would Jesus want me to do with this person? How would He want me to treat them? Would He want me to change my attitude towards them? And who knows – with the new meeting that Jesus had with Thomas, the commission took life in him. We will never know this side of eternity, the extent of what Thomas did after that encounter. Maybe there is somebody whom you know who's just waiting for another chance to prove himself or herself. I wonder whether we can release that person.

The other thing that I like about the way Jesus dealt with Thomas was that He met him exactly where Thomas was. Jesus didn't say, "Thomas, you don't believe it? Well, come find out. Talk to other people, and when you're ready and you say 'Yes Lord, I believe,' then I'll meet you." No. Jesus met him at the point of his doubting, at the point where he said, "I want proof." Jesus met him where Thomas was and then commissioned him to be where he needed to be, with Jesus every moment after that. I want to ask the question of you and me today: Do we need to release someone?

### **2. Receive**

At the end of it, Jesus told Thomas, "Blessed are they who did not see Me and yet believed." You and I today, haven't seen Jesus, and yet we believe. If we are to believe this word of Jesus, He says that there's a blessing for us. We are blessed, and I want you today to just say, "Lord, I receive that blessing."

Maybe that's what you need today. You came to this service saying, "I need something from the Lord," and here's the word for you, beloved. On the one hand to release, but on the other hand to receive a blessing from the Lord. Because you are the one who has believed without actually seeing, and Jesus said, "Blessed are you, blessed am I."

So, two words for us this Sunday as we come down off the mountaintop on the plains and ask the Lord, "Lord, what would you have us do as we walk through the world?" I believe Jesus would say to us: Release and Receive. And I pray that you would respond to both of them today.

Lord Jesus, how invigorating is Your Word, how touching the way You handled Thomas, and How thankful we are for the blessing that comes from You, Lord! if there are some who are listening, who know that there are ones they need to release, I pray that Your Spirit would work overtime in their hearts, prompting them to release ones to fulfill their ministries, if that has been holding them back. Then we open our hearts to You and say " Bless us, Lord Jesus, in Your name we pray. Amen.