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Doubters, Beware!
John 20:24-31

April 23, 2017

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^E John 17:20

^F Hebrews 2:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:7

A. Introduction

1. Original Title

- a. a few months ago when I was planning out the messages to the end of the Gospel of John, I set out the title for today's passage as "Doubters, Believe!"
- b. but somehow, when my fingers began to write out the outline of the sermon, they went their own merry way and typed "Doubters, Beware!"
- c. I later noticed this and was about to correct it, when the thought came to me: "Why not?"
 - (A) for while this passage is an encouragement to those who are facing doubt – and we all do – to overcome it by faith
 - (B) it also gives a warning to any who would persist in doubt, who would nurture doubt, and by that live a defeated Christian life
- d. John wrote this gospel so that its readers should believe, and this incident with Thomas, gives one of the reasons why
- e. Thomas emerged from his doubt with a fuller appreciation of the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ; and we should too

2. Alternate Expression of the Outline

- a. What happens when we miss church!
- b. It is a good thing to believe in the face of the evidence;
- c. It is a better thing to believe because God said it!
- d. John's reasons why we should believe.

B. Not Forsaking Assembling Together

1. Absent or Late? (v 24)

- a. **But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.**
- b. we are not told why he was not there
 - (A) both His Aramaic name, Thomas, and His Greek name, Didymus, have the same meaning: Twin; what the name of the other twin is not known, although there is no shortage of speculation

- (B) perhaps his absence was commendable: remember that when Jesus said He was going to Jerusalem, where they sought to kill Him, that “Thomas therefore, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”” (John 11:16) and he disdained to hide with them for fear of the Jews.
- (C) perhaps he was sorrowing at Jesus’ death, the end of their hopes, and just wanted to be alone – always a dangerous thing to do when you are in that frame of mind
- (D) or perhaps he had been held up on the way, and arrived late when the closing hymn had just been sung
- (E) but, in any case he missed the blessing
- (F) in any case he had to spend the next week full of doubts
- c. nor are we told how long Jesus spent with the disciples on that first Sunday evening
 - (A) it could have been brief; like His appearance to Mary Magdalene
 - (B) or it could have been extended – as with His walking along with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, a 7-mile journey
 - (C) but it was sufficient that they were filled with joy and could not hold back when they next saw Thomas

2. Unconvinced (v 25)

- a. The other disciples therefore were saying to him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I shall 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.”
- b. Can you hear the excitement in their voices?
 - (A) here were the other ten disciples
 - (B) maybe the two Emmaus disciples who had returned
 - (C) those who had considered the women’s gospel as foolishness
 - (D) perhaps even some of the women
 - (E) telling how Jesus had shown them His hands and His side
- c. but Thomas responded so as to earn his name of “Doubting Thomas”
 - (A) one by one he lays out the conditions that must be met before he will believe that Jesus is alive
 - (B) seeing will not be enough – he knew about mirages and optical illusions; perhaps even hearing voices in a person’s head
 - (C) no, he must have solid proof – the Greek is very graphic
 - (1) yes, he must see the nail prints in Jesus’ hands; but also,
 - (2) thrust his finger into the holes made by the nails
 - (3) thrust his hand into the hole made in Jesus side by the spear until it encountered something solid flesh

- d. and He is adamant – as hard as stone – in his refusal to believe
 - (A) unless all of these conditions are met
 - (B) “I shall in no wise believe; no way!”
 - (C) and as far as he is concerned, that settles it
 - (D) but it left him unsettled, unsatisfied for the next week

C. Experience Brings Faith

1. Jesus Attends (v 26)

- a. *And after eight days again His disciples were inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus *came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, “Peace be with you.”*
- b. the disciples meet a week later
 - (A) probably in the same place; certainly in the same way for again the door has been closed to any intruders
 - (B) this would have been at the end of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and may have been a final assembly before going to Galilee
 - (C) more likely it was at Jesus’ instruction for from this time forward we find that it was on the first day of the week that Christians met for communion, for instruction, to present offerings
 - (D) every Sunday morning should be a reminder to every believer that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and He lives today
- c. and Thomas was with them – while he doubted, apparently he did not want to doubt – like the father who prayed, “help my unbelief.”
- d. again Jesus comes into the room
 - (A) the closed doors present no obstacle to the resurrection body
 - (B) again he stands in their midst: no vision but in reality
 - (C) again He greets His fearful disciples with comforting words

2. Jesus Was Listening! (v 27)

- a. *Then He *said to Thomas, “Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing.”*
- b. He turns His attention directly to Thomas
 - (A) to the doubting and troubled follower
 - (B) and reveals that as well as being visibly present now, He had been invisibly present when Thomas had met

with the other disciples and had made his emphatic statement of disbelief

c. but Jesus' reproof to this disciple is very gentle

(A) and indeed it is accommodating

(B) to each of the conditions that Thomas has made, the terms to be met for him to believe, Jesus gives a corresponding command

(1) Thomas: "unless I see" ... Jesus: "see my hands"

(2) "and put my finger" ... "bring here your finger"

(3) "and put my hand" ... "bring your hand"

(4) "I will not believe" ... "be no longer unbelieving"

(C) as emphatic as Thomas' terms had been, so emphatic are Jesus' answers to those terms, for example: "carry over here that finger in which you put such trust and let it 'see' my hands!"

d. we are not told whether or not Thomas actually carried this out

(A) some feel that in merely hearing Jesus echo back to him his words and seeing him there was enough

(B) others think that Thomas could hardly disobey Jesus' commands after he had made such a statement of doing so

(C) John in his epistle suggests that the latter is more likely, not only of Thomas but of all the disciples: "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life—" (1 John 1:1 NAS)

(D) regardless, Thomas was ...

3. Convinced! (v 28)

a. Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

b. in some places in Scripture, both OT & NT that word, "Lord", not all in capital letters, can simply mean "sir" or be a term of respect

(A) but that is not the case here

(B) the two words are unmistakably coupled together

(C) in the reverse order but same way as found in Psalm 35:23, "Stir up Thyself, and awake to my right, And to my cause, my God and my Lord."

(D) what a confession for a Jew, for whom the truth had been impressed from earliest age, "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!" (Deuteronomy 6:4 NAS)

c. Jesus is God – Emmanuel – God come to the earth as a man – for Thomas as a Jew to say this was total commitment

D. Better Blest Faith (v 29)

1. Mixed Approval

- a. Jesus *said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."
- b. or, a statement: "you have believed."
- c. these words are both a commendation, but also a mild rebuke
 - (A) they apply not only to Thomas, but to the other ten disciples
 - (B) because none of these believed until they saw the evidence
 - (C) a commendation, because they did believe
 - (D) a rebuke, because they should have believed based on the words that they had heard more than once from Jesus' own lips
 - (E) "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." (Mark 8:31 NAS) – cf also 10:33

2. The Final Beatitude

- a. for there is a blessing to those who have not needed such visual proof
- b. any who believed after they heard the testimony of the women of of Peter, without having to see for themselves
- c. or since that time, a blessing on those for whom Jesus had prayed: "I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;" (John 17:20 NAS)
- d. the countless number who over the past 20 centuries have come to faith in Jesus Christ, not because of seeing Jesus nor His miracles
- e. but because of God-given faith in the testimony of God's word

E. Reasons for Non-Sight Faith

1. The Half Has Not Been Told (v 30)

- a. Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;
- b. the apostle John had a key part in the writing of God's word, being one of those who, moved by God's Spirit,

recorded "what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes ..."

- (A) from these words we gain a little insight into how the inspiration of God's word took place
- (B) John, like Luke before him, has "compiled an account or record", writing down the things accomplished by Jesus Christ
- (C) but it is not an inclusive account
 - (1) indeed, that were impossible, John later says
 - (2) but rather there is in this gospel a deliberate selection from among the many signs that Jesus performed for the purpose which he will state in a moment
 - (3) and a comparison with the other three gospels shows that John generally does not again cover what they have written
- (D) but to all that John has written there have been witnesses who can testify that John's record is true
- (E) so that we are confronted with a record about which we read last week from 1 Corinthians 15 – "within a very few years of the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus was in the mind of at least one man of education absolutely irrefutable." –{2}.

2. These Words Are for You (v 31)

- a. but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.
- b. that word, 'you', is in the plural – this verse is addressed to each and everyone who reads this passage and this gospel
- c. it has been written with a purpose and that purpose can be expressed in two results, results which cannot exist the one without the other
- d. results that are based fully and completely upon the Name of Jesus
 - (A) as elsewhere in Scripture, name here stands for the person Himself
 - (B) that Jesus is the Christ: the promised One who is anointed by God to be Prophet, Priest and King
 - (C) that Jesus is the Son of God: bearing in Himself every attribute of God, bearing the complete Nature of God
- e. that first we should believe in Jesus – not only the facts and truth concerning Him – but in a personal way: "My Lord and my God"
- f. the second, that hereby we should know life: real life right now in relation to the one "in whom there is life" (John 1:4) and hereafter in the place where He has gone to prepare for us, eternal life.

F. Conclusion

1. The Warning

- a. which is implicit in this history of the doubting of Thomas
- b. as well as in John's statement of the purpose of this gospel
- c. is well summed up by the writer of the book of Hebrews
- d. "3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." (Hebrews 2:3-4 NAS)
- e. "For we walk", says 2 Corinthians 5:7, "by faith and not by sight"

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NLT	New Living Translation © 1996 Tyndale Charitable Trust
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 National Council of Churches of Christ
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

- Bruce – The Gospel & Epistles of John, by F. F. Bruce, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI; 1983
- BM – Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
- Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.
- NICNT – The New International Commentary on the New Testament
The Gospel according to John, by Leon Morris
- NTC – New Testament Commentary, by William Hendriksen; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI; 1954
- RWP – Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament, by Dr. A. T. Robertson

2. R. H. Kennett; NICNT, *in loc.*