

## Thomas: The One Who Asked and Received

**John 20:19-31** <sup>19</sup> Then, the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace *be* with you." <sup>20</sup> When He had said this, He showed them *His* hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." <sup>22</sup> And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained." <sup>24</sup> Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." <sup>26</sup> And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" <sup>27</sup> Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." <sup>28</sup> And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed." <sup>30</sup> And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

After Jesus ascension Thomas, liked most of the apostles, stayed in Jerusalem for a while preaching the gospel to the Jewish people. After that he went to India.

If you open your bulletin to the back page, you can see on the top left a map of churches that Thomas started in India. On the top right is the cave where he would spend a great deal of time praying. Bottom left is the mountain where he was killed by a Hindu Priest because he was preaching Jesus. And finally, on the bottom right is the church built on top of the grave where he was buried.

The point is Thomas served the risen Lord very faithfully. Yes, he started out as doubting Thomas, but he died as faithful Thomas. Yes, he had trouble believing at first, but in the end, he was willing even to die confessing that Jesus was risen from the dead.

One might say he went from zero to hero, from a failure as an apostle to an A+. How? How did he so completely turn his life around?

There are stacks and stacks of books and any number of motivational speakers out there these days that will give you any number of 12 step processes or the 3 keys to unlocking your full potential.

We might well ask Thomas the same question, how did you do it? What is your secret?

The answer of course is Thomas did nothing, Jesus did everything. Thomas was ready to write off Jesus as dead and gone, but Jesus in his grace gave to Thomas exactly the proof he asked for and by His power turned Thomas's life around.

Thomas is an example for us. But he is not an example of what we can become if we . . . He is an example of what Jesus can do and accomplish in our lives.

In his doubt Thomas asked for help to believe and Jesus answered in his grace. Just ask and see what Jesus can accomplish in your life.

### **Thomas asked and the Lord answered.**

Granted Thomas did not exactly word it as a request.

**John 20:25** "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

But God's grace is seen in this that he accepts it as a sincere and faithful prayer, despite the sinful attitude of Thomas.

In the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned, God came and called them to repentance. What have you done? Why are you hiding? Adam and Eve responded by shifting the blame. This was not exactly the best form of confession, but it was at least a recognition that what they had done was wrong. Here also God in his grace is quick to respond as though it were a sincere confession. He responds with the promise of the Messiah and the forgiveness of their sins.

Adam and Eve's response was not exactly a confession of sin. But God in his grace is quick to respond as though it were a complete confession. Thomas' words are not exactly a request but Jesus in his grace is quick to respond as though Thomas had made the most heartfelt prayer. He gives to Thomas exactly what he asked and more than this, even what he needed.

Here we see the truth of Paul's words:

**Romans 8:26-27** <sup>26</sup> Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. <sup>27</sup> Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.

How many of us have at some time said something in anger, or in confusion and perhaps our spouse, perhaps somebody else has stepped up and said, "What he or she means is . . ." This is what the Holy Spirit here does for us. He intercedes with God.

We like Thomas, like Adam and Eve often approach God in completely the wrong way. We come to him in anger. We come before him demanding that he must do what we want. We come before him blaming others. We come before him refusing to forgive those who have sinned against us even though we are asking him to forgive us. We come before him doubting. We come before him stomping our feet, I will not do that Lord, I will not believe unless . . .

Yet in all these wrong and sinful emotions, God finds the tiniest spark of confession, the smallest spark of faith, the itchy-bitsy particle of prayer and responds to that by his grace. He ignores and forgives all the sin that lies on top and answering the underlying need.

The Holy Spirit intercedes and says to God what Thomas really meant is “could you please help me out I’m really having a hard time believing that you rose from the dead.”

So Thomas asked, imperfectly and filled with sin, but the Lord responded by His grace. Here Thomas here are my hands and my side. The Lord answers the prayers of his people and gives what is asked for.

This is the true meaning of those passages in which Jesus urges us to believe that he is listening to our prayers.

**John 16:24** Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

Thomas asked and he did receive, and his life was filled with joy. It may not seem like that to us. He lived in caves and wandered without a home and had little money and was killed by a Hindu Priest. This isn’t exactly what we would call a joyful life. But nevertheless, his life was clearly filled with the joy of Jesus resurrection. It was that joy that drove him. It was that joy, along with the power of the Holy Spirit, which no doubt made him such an effective preacher.

**Matthew 17:20** <sup>20</sup> So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

Thomas had just such a mountain in his way. The mountain of unbelief which made it so difficult for Thomas to believe that Jesus was really risen from the dead. Yet Jesus by his power removed that mountain in his appearance to Thomas. This is what Jesus means when he talks about mountains. These spiritual mountains which stop us from service Christ. Ask and they will be removed.

**John 14:12** <sup>12</sup> "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do, because I go to My Father.

Thomas certainly did works much greater than the miracles of Jesus. He may never have raised anyone from the dead but through his preaching the gospel was brought to virtually the entirety of the east. Not only did he preach throughout India, but those who heard it from him carried it to China and even Japan.

All of these passages promise us God's response to our prayers, but they also call us to understand that God will look past the sin of our prayers and respond to the underlying true need.

When we pray, we often say things like this: God I need more money. To which God says no you don't. God I need a better spouse to which God says no you don't. God I need a better job, and God's says no that is not what you need.

Instead the Spirit translates for us. Not God I need more money but God I need contentment. To this God responds, yes and that I will give you. Not God I need a better spouse, but God I need to be more forgiving. To this God responds yes and that I will give you. Not God you need to do more for me, but God I need help trusting you. To this God responds yes and that I will give you.

This is what Jesus meant when he said faith can move mountains and do greater miracles. That when we ask, he will open our hearts to see his resurrection and grant us power to forgive and to believe. Seeing the risen Christ we by faith can be like Thomas serving Christ with our whole life.

That is what Thomas prayed in our text. God, I need help to believe that you are risen from the dead. And God said yes that is something you need, and I will give it to you. His prayer was very imperfect and covered with sin. But God's grace was stronger. Our prayers are also sinful and imperfect but God's grace answer the true need and turns our life around.

Amen