

Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 69

CHRIST AND THOMAS

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Transcript

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John 20:24-31

Below is an Analysis of our present passage:— 1. The absence of Thomas, verse 24. 2. The skepticism of Thomas, verse 25. 3. Christ appears to Thomas, verses 26, 27. 4. The confession of Thomas, verse 28. 5. Christ's last beatitude, verse 29. 6. The signs of Jesus, verse 30. 7. The purpose of this Gospel, verse 31. In our last chapter we were occupied with the appearing of the Lord unto the apostles as they were assembled together in some room, probably the "upper-room" in which the Lord's Supper was instituted. But on this occasion one of the Eleven, Thomas, was absent. We are not expressly told why he was not present with his brethren, but from what we learn of him in other passages, from his words to the Ten when they told him of their having seen the Lord, and from Christ's own words to Thomas when He appeared unto the Eleven, it is almost impossible to avoid the conclusion that unbelief was the cause of his absence. In three different passages Thomas is mentioned in this Gospel, and on each occasion he evidenced a gloomy disposition. He was a man who looked on the darker side of things: he took despondent views both of the present and the future. Yet he was not lacking in courage, nor in loyalty and devotion to the Savior. The first time Thomas comes before us is in chapter 11. At the close of 10 we read how the enemies of Christ "sought again to take him; but he escaped out of their hand, and went away again beyond Jordan." While there, the sisters of Lazarus sent unto Him, acquainting Him with the sickness of their brother. After waiting two days, the Savior said unto His disciples, "Let us go into Judea." The disciples at once reminded Him that it was there the Jews had, only lately, sought to stone Him; so they ask, "Goest thou thither again?" At the end of His colloquy with them, He said, "Let us go." And then we are told, "Thomas, which is called Didymus, said unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). These words throw not a little light on the character of him who uttered them. First, they reveal Thomas as a man of morbid feeling—death was the object which filled his vision. Second, they indicate he had an energetic disposition, "Let us go." Third, they exhibit his courage—he was ready to go even to death. Fourth, they manifest his affection for Christ—"Let us also go, that we may die with him." The next time Thomas is brought to our notice is in chapter 14. The Lord had announced to

the apostles that in a little while He would leave them, and whither He was going, they could not come. In consequence, they were filled with sadness. In view of their grief, the Lord said, "Let not your heart be troubled," supporting this with the comforting assurances that He was going to the Father's House, going there to prepare a place for them, and from which He would come and receive them unto Himself: ending with "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." Thomas was the first to reply, and his doleful response was, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" (John 14:5). Ignoring the precious promises of the Savior, Thomas saw in His departure only the extinction of hope. Thus we behold, once more, his gloomy nature, and, in addition, his sceptical turn of mind. He reminds us very much of John Bunyan's "Fearing," "Despondency," and "Much Afraid," in his *Pilgrim's Progress*—types of a large class of Christians who are successors of doubting Thomas. The third and last time that Thomas occupies any prominence in this Gospel is in the 20th chapter. Here the first thing noted about him is that he was not with the other disciples when the Lord appeared unto them. In view of what has been before us above, this is scarcely to be wondered at. "If the bare possibility of his Lord's death had plunged this loving yet gloomy heart into despondency, what dark despair must have preyed on it when that death was actually accomplished! How the figure of his dead Master had burnt itself into his soul, is seen from the manner in which his mind dwells on the prints of the nails, the wound in His side. It is by these only, and not by well-known features or peculiarity of form, he will recognize and identify his Lord. His heart was with the lifeless body on the cross, and he could not bear to see the friends of Jesus or speak with those who had shared his hopes, but buries his disappointment and desolation in solitude and silence. Thus it was that, like many melancholy persons, he missed the opportunity of seeing what would effectually have scattered his doubts!" (Mr. Dods). "But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came" (John 20:24). The "But" is ominous and at once exposes the folly of the inventions which have been made to excuse Thomas. The disciples convened in the evening of that first day of the week under most unusual circumstances. John, at least, was satisfied that the Savior had risen; of the others, some were sceptical, for they believed not the report of the women who had seen Him that very morning. No doubt the apostles assembled with mingled feeling of suspense and excitement. That Thomas was absent can only be accounted for, we believe, by what the other passages reveal of his gloomy and sceptical disposition. Note how the Holy Spirit has here added "Thomas called Didymus," which is evidently designed as a connecting link—cf. John 11:16. On the resurrection day he least of all believed the tidings of the women, isolating himself in the sorrow of death in wilful unbelief—the wilfulness of it is seen in the next verse. The state of Thomas' soul coincided with his absence on that memorable evening. He resisted the blessedness of the resurrection, and therefore did not join his brethren, and thus share the joy of the Master's presence in their midst. Slow of heart to believe, he remained for a whole week in darkness and gloom. One important lesson we may learn from this is, how much we lose by our failure to cultivate the fellowship of Christian brethren. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Heb. 10:25) is the word of Scripture. Two warnings against disobeying this were furnished in connection with Christ's resurrection. In Luke 24:13 we read, "And behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about three score furlongs": mark the words in *italics*. These two disciples had turned their backs on their brethren in Jerusalem. Little wonder, then, that when the Lord Himself drew near to them "their eyes were holden that they should not know Him" (Luke 24:16). Yet even to them the Lord manifested His long-suffering grace by making Himself known (verse 31)! And what was the effect upon them? This: "They rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem and found the eleven" (verse 33)! When Christians are in fellowship with Christ, they desire and seek the fellowship of His people; conversely, when they are out of fellowship with the Lord they have little or no desire for communion with believers. It

was thus with Thomas. Out of fellowship with Christ, through unbelief, he forsook the assembly. And how much he lost! God's blessing, Christ's presence, the Holy Spirit's power, joy of heart, and in addition, a whole week spent in despondency. What a warning for us! "The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord" (John 20:25). This is most blessed. The Ten were not callously indifferent to the welfare of their erring brother. They did not say, "O, well, there is no need for us to be troubled; he is the loser; if he had been in his proper place, he, too, would have seen the Savior, heard His blessing of 'Peace be unto you,' and received the Holy Spirit; but he was not here, and it only serves him right that he should suffer for his negligence; let us leave him alone." O, no. The selfish world may reason and act thus; but not so those who are truly constrained by the love of Christ. The more we love Him, the more shall we love His people. So it was here. As soon as the Ten had been favored with this gracious visit from the risen Redeemer, they sought out Thomas and communicated to him the glad tidings. How this rebukes some of us! If we were more in fellowship with Christ, we should have more heart for His wayward and wandering sheep. It is those who are "spiritual" that are exhorted to restore the one "overtaken in a fault" (Gal. 6:13) "But he said unto them, 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 hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:26). This illustrates the same principle so sadly exemplified in John 20:18. Those who know Christ will bear testimony of Him to others, but they must be prepared for the unbelief of those whom they address. The Ten spoke to Thomas, but he believed them not. This also shows how that the best of men are subject to unbelief. Thomas had witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus, he had heard the Lord's promises that He would rise again on the third day, yet believed not now that He was risen. What point this gives to the admonition in Hebrews 12:1, where we are exhorted to lay aside "the sin (unbelief) which doth so easily beset us!" Thomas refused to accredit the testimony of ten competent witnesses who had seen Christ with their own eyes, men who were his friends and brethren, and who could have no object in deceiving him. But he obstinately declares that he will not believe, unless he himself sees and touches the Lord's body. He presumes to prescribe the conditions which must be met before he is ready to receive the glad tidings. Thomas was still sceptical. Perhaps he asked his brethren. Why did not Christ remain with you? Where is He now? Why did He not show Himself to me? He implied, though he did not say it directly, that they were laboring under a delusion. And were they altogether blameless? They told Thomas "We have seen the Lord," but apparently they said nothing of the gracious and wondrous words which they had heard from His lips! Is there not a lesson, a warning, here for us? It is not our experiences which we are to proclaim, but His words! "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 hand into his side, I will not believe." This is the only place in the New Testament where the "nails" which pierced the Savior's hands and feet are actually mentioned. The Romans did not always use nails when crucifying criminals. Sometimes they bound the victims hands and feet to the cross by strong cords. The fact that "nails" were used in connection with the Savior, and the express mention of them here by Thomas, witnesses to the actual and literal fulfillment of Psalm 22:16: "they pierced my hands and my feet." "And after eight days again, his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you" (John 20:26). "After eight days" signifies, according to the Jewish manner of reckoning time (who counted any part of a day as a whole one), after a week. It was, therefore, on the second Christian sabbath that the Eleven assembled together, this time Thomas being present. Observe that the Holy Spirit mentions the fact that again the doors were shut, for He would emphasize once more the supernatural character of the resurrection—body. The close similarity between this and John 20:19 makes it plain that this visit of the Savior was for the special benefit of Thomas. But mark a significant omission here: nothing is now said of their "fear of the Jews!" His "Peace be unto you" (John 20:19) had calmed their hearts and taken away

their fear of men. It is one more witness to the power of the Word. "And Thomas was with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst and said, Peace be unto you." Marvelous grace was this. As we have said, this second manifestation of Christ unto the apostles was expressly made for the special benefit of Thomas. The Savior made the same mysterious entrance through the closed doors and came with the same comforting salutation. There is much for us to learn from this. How patient and tender is the Lord with dull and slow believers! Forcefully does this come out here. Christ did not excommunicate His unbelieving disciple, but addressed to him the same word of "Peace" as He had previously saluted the Ten. O, how graciously does He bear with the waywardness and infirmities of His people. Timely are the admonitions of Bishop Ryle: "Let us take care that we drink into our Lord's spirit and copy His example. Let us never set down men in a low place, as graceless and godless, because their faith is feeble and their love is cold. Let us remember the case of Thomas, and be very pitiful and of tender mercy. Our Lord has many weak children in His family, many dull pupils in His school, many raw soldiers in His army, many lame sheep in His flock. Yet He bears with them all, and casts none away. Happy is that Christian who has learned to deal likewise with his brethren. There are many in the Family, who, like Thomas, are dull and slow, but for all that, like Thomas, are real and true believers." "And said, Peace be unto you." This is the third time that we find the precious word on the lips of the Savior in this chapter, and on each occasion it was used with a different design. The first (John 20:19), tells of the glorious consequences of His atoning work: peace has been made with God, peace is now imparted to those whose sins have been put away. The second (John 20:21), is His provision for service, using that word in its largest scope. It is this which supplies power for our walk, and it is only to the extent that the peace of God is ruling our hearts that we are able to rise above the hindrances of our path and the opposition of the flesh. But the third "Peace" is the means of recovery. This comes out most strikingly in the next verse. "Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands"—compare the "when he had so said ('Peace be unto you' John 20:19) he showed unto them his hands and his side" (John 20:20). "Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless but believing" (John 20:27). Thus the Lord did for Thomas what He had done for the Ten—He pointed out that which memorialized the ground on which true "peace" rests. The Lord went back to first principles with this erring disciple. Thomas needed to be re-established in the truths taught by the pierced hands and side of the Savior, and therefore he got just what was required to restore his wandering soul. What a lesson for us! When we have gone astray, what is it that recalls us? Not occupation with the intricacies of prophecy or the finer points of doctrine (important and valuable as these are in their place) but the great foundation truth of the Atonement. It was the sight of the Savior's wounds which scattered all Thomas' doubts, overcame his self-will, and brought him to the feet of Christ as an adoring worshipper. So it is with us. Have we grown cold and worldly; are we out of communion with the Lord Jesus—He recalls us to Himself by the same precious truth which first won our hearts. This is what breaks us down:— "And yet to find Thee still the same— 'Tis this that humbles us with shame."

Was it not for this reason the Lord appointed the loaf and the cup for the Feast of remembrance! It is the emblems of His broken-body and poured-out blood which move the heart, quicken the spirit, thrill the soul, and rekindle the joy which we tasted when we first looked by faith upon His hands and side. This, then, we believe, is the force of the connection between John 20:27 and what immediately precedes. What a lesson for us: the most effective way of dealing with backsliders is to tenderly remind them of the dying love of the Lord Jesus! "Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless but believing." While the link between this and the verse before is unspeakably blessed, yet the actual contents of it are most searching and solemn. The

language which the Savior here employed affords positive proof that He had heard the petulant and sceptical words of Thomas to his fellow-apostles—cf. John 20:25. No one had seen the Lord as visibly present when Thomas gave utterance to his unbelief. None had reported his words to Christ. Yet was He fully acquainted with them! He had listened to the outburst of His disciple, and now makes Thomas aware of it. Wondrous proof was this of His omniscience! Searching warning is it for us! The One who died on Calvary's cross was "God manifest in flesh," and being God, He not only sees every deed we perform, but also hears every word that we utter. O that we might be more conscious, hour by hour, that the eye of Divine holiness is ever upon us, that the ear of the omnipresent One is ever open to all that we say, that He still stands in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks! To realize this is to walk "in the fear of God." "Reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side." What solemn light this casts upon what we read in John 19:34. It must have been a large wound for the Lord to tell Thomas to thrust in his hand.; What indignities the Savior suffered for our sakes! Again, do not these wounds of Christ throw light upon the character of the resurrection body? Do they not argue strongly that our personal identity will survive the great transformation? It needs to be borne in mind that the bodies of those who sleep in the dust of the earth are not going to be re-created, but resurrected! And grand and glorious as will be the change from our present mortal bodies, yet it seems clear from several scriptures that our personal identity will be so preserved that recognition will not only be possible but certain. "Be not faithless, but believing." "This is a rebuke and an exhortation at the same time. It is not merely a reproof to Thomas for his scepticism on this particular occasion, but an urgent counsel to be of a more believing turn of mind for the time to come. 'Shake off this habit of doubting, questioning, and discrediting every one. Give up thine unbelieving disposition. Become more willing to believe and trust.' No doubt the primary object of the sentence was to correct and chastise Thomas for his sceptical declaration to his brethren. But I believe our Lord had in view the further object of correcting Thomas' whole character, and directing his attention to his besetting sin. How many there are among us who ought to take to themselves our Lord's words! How faithless we often are, and how slow to believe!" (Bishop Ryle). "And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). How blessed! In a moment the doubter was transformed into a worshipper. Like Paul (Acts 26:19), Thomas "was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." There was no room for scepticism now, no occasion for him to put his finger "into the print of the nails," and thrust his hand "into his side" (John 20:25). The language of Christ in the next verse—"Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed"—makes it clear that Thomas did not do as he had boasted. There was no need for him to handle Christ now: his intellectual doubts had vanished because his heart was satisfied! The words of Thomas on this occasion gave evidence of his faith in Christ, his subjection to Him, and his affection for Him. "And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God." This is the only time in the Gospels that anyone owned Christ as "God." And what was it that evoked this blessed testimony? The context tells us. The fact that Christ knew the very words which he had used, satisfied Thomas that Immanuel stood before him; hence his worshipful confession. And when we meet Him in the air, see the glory streaming through His pierced hands and side ("He had bright beams out of His side!" Habakkuk 3:4), when we hear His "Peace be unto you," when we perceive that He knows all about us, we too shall cry "My Lord and my God." How marvelous are the ways of Divine grace. Doubting Thomas was the one who gave the strongest and most conclusive testimony to the absolute Deity of the Savior which ever came from the lips of a man! Just as the railing thief became the one to own Christ's Lordship from the cross, just as timid Joseph and Nicodemus were the ones who honored the dead body of the Savior, just as the women were the boldest at the sepulcher, just as unfaithful Peter was the one whom Christ bade "Feed my sheep," just as the prime persecutor of the early church became the apostle to the Gentiles, so the sceptical and materialistic Thomas was the one to say "My Lord and my God." Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound!

"And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God." Mark the word "said unto him." It was no mere ejaculation. Thomas was not here speaking to the Father nor of the Father, but to and of the Son. The fact that Thomas addressed Him as "my Lord" evidences that he too had now "received the Holy Spirit" (cf. John 20:22), for "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). It is very striking to contrast what we read of in 1 Kings 18:39. When Elijah met the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, and in response to his faith and prayer, Jehovah was pleased to manifest Himself by sending fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice and lick up the water; the people exclaimed, "The Lord, he is the God, the Lord, he is the God." But Thomas here did far more than this: he not only acknowledged that Jesus of Nazareth was Lord and God, but he confessed Him as "my Lord and my God." And how striking that this is recorded in connection with the third notice of Thomas, and the third appearance of the resurrected Christ in this Gospel—it is only as risen from the dead the Lord Jesus could be our Lord and God! "And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God." "This noble confession of Thomas admits of only one meaning: it was a blessed testimony to our Lord's Deity. It was a clear, unmistakable declaration that Thomas believed Him, when he saw Him that day, to be not only man, but God. And, above all, it was a testimony which our Lord received and did not prohibit and a declaration which He did not say one word to rebuke. When Cornelius fell down at the feet of Peter and would have worshipped him, the apostle refused such honor at once: 'Stand up; I myself am a man' (Acts 10:26). When the people of Lystra would have done sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, 'they rent their clothes and ran in among the people, saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We are men of like passions with you,' Acts 14:15. (When John fell down to worship before the feet of the angel, he said unto him, 'See thou do it not': Revelation 22:8, 9.—A.W.P.). But when Thomas said to Jesus, 'My Lord and my God,' the words do not elicit a syllable of reproof from our holy and truth-loving Master. Can we doubt that these things were written for our learning? "Let us settle it firmly in our minds that the Deity of Christ is one of the grand foundation truths of Christianity, and let us be willing to go to the stake rather than deny it. Unless our Lord Jesus is very God of very God, there is an end of His mediation, His atonement, His priesthood, His whole work of redemption. These doctrines are useless blasphemies unless Christ is God. Forever let us bless God that the Deity of our Lord is taught everywhere in the Scriptures, and stands on evidence that can never be overthrown. Above all, let us daily repose our sinful selves on Christ with undoubting confidence, as one that is perfect God as well as perfect man. He is man, and therefore can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He is God, and therefore 'is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by him.' That Christian has no cause to fear who can look to Jesus by faith and say with Thomas, 'My Lord and my God.'" (Bishop Ryle). "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29). Christ accepted Thomas' confession, but reminded him that it was occasioned by outward signs, the appeal to his sight. What a warning against the modern craving for "signs"—a tendency upon which Satan is now trading in many directions. And how it condemns those materialists who say they will not believe in anything which they cannot examine with their physical senses! Thomas had insisted upon seeing the risen Christ, and the Lord graciously granted his request. The result was he believed. But the Lord pointed out to His disciple that there is a greater blessedness resting on those who have never seen Him in the flesh, yet who have believed—an expression which looked back to the Old Testament saints as well as forward to us! This was the last of our Lord's beatitudes. "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." What a precious word is this for our hearts. We have never seen Him in the flesh. Here, then, is a promise for us. Should it be asked: How do you know that the rejected One is now in the glory? the answer would be, Because of His own word that when He went there He would send down to His people the Holy Spirit. Therefore, every joy in God which we now have, every longing for Christ, manifests His Spirit's presence

in our souls, and this is a precious testimony to the fact that Christ is now on High. These manifestations of the Spirit here are the proofs that Christ is there. They are the antitype of the "bells" on the robe of the high priest when he went unto the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement (see Exodus 28:33-35.). As the people listened on the outside, they heard the unseen movements of their representative within; so we are conscious of the presence of our High Priest in the Holiest by the tongues of the "bells"—the sweet testimony now borne to us by the Holy Spirit. And why is there a greater blessedness pronounced on us than upon those who saw Christ during the days when He tabernacled among men? Because we own Him during the day of His rejection, and therefore He is more honored by such faith! It is faith in Himself, faith which rests alone on the Word, which Christ pronounces "blessed." "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book" (John 20:30). This and the following verse comes in parenthetically. The whole of chapter 20 is occupied with a recountal of the appearance of the risen Christ unto His own, and this is continued in chapter 21 as the very first verse shows. We take it that the "many other signs" refer not to what the Lord had done through the whole course of His public ministry, but to the proofs which the risen Christ had furnished His apostles. This is confirmed by the words "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples," whereas, most of His ministerial signs were performed before the general public. There were other signs which the Savior gave to the Eleven which proved that He had risen from the dead, but the Holy Spirit did not move John to record them. Some of them are described in the Synoptics. For example, His appearing to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:15), His eating in the presence of the Eleven (Luke 24:43), His opening their understandings to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45), His appearing to them in Galilee (Matthew 28:16), His declaration that all power was given unto Him in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18), His commissioning them to make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the triune God (Matthew 28:19, 20). Others of these "signs" are recorded in Acts 1, 1 Corinthians 15, etc. When John says that these "other signs" which Jesus did are not written in this book [the fourth Gospel], he implies that they are in some other book or books. On this, one has quaintly said, "St. John generously recognizes the existence of other books beside his own, and disclaims the idea of his Gospel being the only one which Christians ought to read. Happy is that author which can humbly say 'My book does not contain everything about the subject it handles. There are other books about it. Read them.'" "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31). Here the Holy Spirit tells why the resurrection-signs of Christ mentioned by John are recorded in this Gospel. They are written not merely to furnish us with historical information about the Lord Jesus, but that we might believe on Him! They are written that we might believe on Him as "the Christ," the Messiah, the anointed One—Him to whom the Old Testament prophets pointed. They are written that we might believe on Jesus as "the Son of God," the second Person of the Godhead incarnate, the One whose Divine glories are unfolded more particularly in the New Testament. And they are written that we might believe on Him thus in order that we might have "life through his name." It is faith in the written revelation which God has given of His Son which brings "life" and all that is included in that word—salvation, immortality, eternal glory. Reader, hast thou "believed"? Not about Christ, but in Him? Have you received Him as your Lord and Savior? If so, the blessing of Heaven rests upon you. If not, you are, even now, "under condemnation," and if you remain in your wicked unbelief there awaits you nought but "the blackness of darkness forever." The following questions are to help the student on John 21:1-14:— 1. Why did not the disciples recognize Christ, verse 4? 2. Why did Christ ask the question in verse 5? 3. What does Peter's act denote, verse 7? 4. Why mention the "fire of coals," verse 9? 5. Why was not the net broken, verse 11? 6. What is the spiritual significance of verses 12, 13?

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