

John 20: 24-29; “Unless I See in His Hands”,
An Easter Sunday Afternoon Sermon Delivered by
Pastor Paul Rendall on April 12th, 2009.

It is evident from Thomas' behavior in this incident that the Lord would Himself show us how strong the sin of faithlessness or unbelief is; especially when it was found even in an Apostle who ought to have known better. Unbelief is a sin which each of us who have trusted in Christ need to guard ourselves against, because sometimes even redeemed human nature will trust only in what can be shown and proven to it. The righteous man lives by faith and not by sight. But to find this unbelief so stubbornly lodged in the mind of Thomas indicates in him a disposition to an independent judgment which is really very disturbing. “Unless I see, I will not believe,” he says. He had already heard the testimony of his fellow Apostles saying that they had seen the Lord. Does his own judgment of the matter really have to supersede and disqualify all of their statements to him that Jesus was risen? It was good for Thomas to have had this confrontation with His living Lord. And it is good for all of us, I think, to remember the words of 2 Timothy 2: 11. “This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him.” “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him.” “If we deny Him, He also will deny us.” “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.” We see from this passage that the Lord Jesus did not deny Thomas here, but He did deal decisively with his faithlessness. And so, too, He will deal with the faithlessness of any of His people who fall into it. So this afternoon we want to deal with our own unbelief, if we have any, in light of Thomas' great mistake and sin, and ask the Lord to show us Himself. And when we do so, I think that we will come to see how very good He is to come to us and establish and confirm our faith when we trust in Him. We will look first at what unbelief can lead to when it is found in disciple of Christ. Then secondly we will look at Jesus' gentle reproof of Thomas. And then 3rd we will look at the final Beatitude that Jesus gave to Thomas and to all believers down through the history of the Church, and even to us.

1st – Let's examine what unbelief can lead to when it is found in a disciple of Christ.

(Verses 24 and 25)

It says in verse 24 – “Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.” We must ask the question, for it begs for an answer; why was Thomas not with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them the first time? Why was he missing at that important point? It was because of unbelief. The particular form of unbelief that he fell into consisted of not believing in the testimony of other believers; and instead, thinking that he had to figure it all out for himself. He was trusting to his own understanding and judgment rather than thinking that he might need to receive and believe the

testimony of others. Sometimes unbelief develops in us because other believers have spiritual experience which we do not want to recognize, or we are unwilling to receive. We can't figure out why they should have experience or knowledge that we don't have. Sometimes believers fall into pride of understanding in this way, and it leads them to unbelief. They are unwilling to receive the observations and testimony of others at critical points and thus their faith suffers. Turn with me to Luke Chapter 24 and we will see how Thomas' unbelief developed. You will recall that on the first day of the week that the women had come to the tomb early and they found the stone rolled away. They went in and found 2 men (angels) standing there, and the angels told them, as it is recorded for us here in verse 5, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" "He is not here, but is risen!" "Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'" "And they remembered His words." They received the testimony of the angels even though they had not yet seen Jesus risen from the dead. "Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest." (Thomas was there at that point) "It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles." "And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them." The word for idle tales in the margin is "nonsense". In other words, some of them were saying, "This doesn't make sense to me, and only a fool would believe such a thing." Most of them dismissed it. Verse 12 however says, "But Peter arose and ran to the tomb; and stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying by themselves; and he departed, marveling to himself at what had happened." He was willing to consider the testimony of the women and to ponder it. And then he went to see for himself. This was the right reaction; even though it could have been coupled with stronger faith as John's was, when he went to the tomb to look. Now turn over to Mark Chapter 16 and we will see this again. Verse 9 says, "Now when Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons." "She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept." "And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe." Why didn't they believe? Was it because she was a woman and not one of the 12? Was it because they thought that if He was really alive that they would of necessity have to be the ones that He would appear to first? It is very true that they were downcast about the death of Jesus and they were mourning and weeping over Him. And this is also something that contributes to unbelief. They had forgotten many of the things that He had said to them which would have strengthened them in their faith at this point, had they believably called them to mind. They didn't call to mind Jesus' own words and His testimony to them. In John 14 Jesus had said to them, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me." "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you." "I go

to prepare a place for you.” “And 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 where I go you know and the way you know.” And Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?’ “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life.’” “No one comes to the Father except through Me.” You can see Thomas’ confusion at this point. How can we know the way? The way is believing in Jesus and the promises that He gives.

In John 16: 16 Jesus mentions His leaving again. He says, “A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.” “Then some of His disciples said among themselves, ‘What is this that He say to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me; and ‘because I go to the Father?’” “They said therefore, ‘What is this that He says, ‘A little while?’” “We do not know what He is saying.” “Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, ‘Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, “A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me?’” “Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.” (Verse 22) “Therefore you will have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.” Now this is something that Thomas and some of the others had forgotten or not sufficiently considered. And this is why Thomas fell into faithlessness at this point. When he saw Jesus die on the cross; when he saw the nails driven into Jesus’ hands and feet and blood coming out; when towards the last he saw the Roman soldier with his spear make that dreadful hole in his side plunging it up into his heart, he probably said to himself, “Well that is the end of everything.” “Now that Jesus is dead, and there is no bringing him back; I am finished with following this cause.” “There is no use fooling myself with hopes that will not come to pass.” “He is not coming back.” “Jesus is dead and the kingdom is destroyed.” But this was a sheer denial of all that Jesus had taught him and lived before him for 3 and one half years. He was just sorrowful enough and grief-stricken enough to think to himself, “Well, I might as well get away and be by myself now.” “I don’t want to fool myself by believing the fables which the others are making up, about the Lord being risen.”

And so he left the eleven when he understood that some of them were still trying to insist that Jesus was risen, when he couldn’t believe that it was possible. This was a believer in Jesus, and an apostle no less; falling into unbelief. It was that same unbelief that led him to stay away from meeting with the other disciples that evening of Jesus’ resurrection. He was not there, not because he couldn’t have been there. He wasn’t there because He couldn’t believe what they were saying, or the things that they were rejoicing in. And because he wasn’t there; he missed the first appearing of Jesus to the other apostles and disciples. There is a lesson here for all of us. Sometimes things happen in the life of a church.

Sometimes there may be difficulties in understanding a situation involving many of the members of a church. Any of us, in the process of trying to figure out the truth, might become skeptical and fall into the unbelieving mindset that Thomas did. We may come to think that the Lord is not with us. We may feel like giving up our involvement in the local church of which we are a part. If we fall into unbelief and absent ourselves from the assembling of the saints because we think that we understand a difficult situation better than others; we might find later that we did not at all understand it better. We will find that we that we only hurt ourselves further by missing out on what Christ will do to prove Himself and His power to us. Christ revealed Himself to Thomas and His gathered disciples in a way that did resolve all of their difficulties. And He did undertake to solve Thomas' difficulties in particular. Do we think that we know better than some other believers what the facts are and what the truth is, about the particular situation that grieves us? Then we should not be afraid to keep coming to the meetings of the church and have others, or ourselves, proved wrong. Over time, all things become clear for the one who has faith in Christ. But that first evening, when Christ appeared to the rest, Thomas was not with them. He hurt himself in falling into unbelief. But the Lord retrieved him from his unbelief and faithlessness, as He will every one of His own. Let us learn from Thomas mistake that is good to continue to have faith in Christ, even when it looks like all is lost. Let us learn from the testimony of others; that it is good when others say that they have seen the Lord, and His will, in the teaching and preaching of His word, to receive their testimony and continue on with them believing that the Lord will reveal Himself to us and show us the truth in time. Let our attitude not become like that of unbelieving Thomas. "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger in to the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." Beloved, do not let this happen to you. Do not let your own skepticism and unbelief lead you to separate yourself from God's assembled people. Do not place unreasonable conditions on your faith, saying as Thomas did, "Unless I see such and such", I will not believe. This is nothing other than stubbornness of heart. How foolish it is to think that the Lord should have to reveal Himself physically and personally to every believer to convince them that He is alive. It would become a full time job for the Lord. Instead, He expects us to listen to the testimony of others to the power of the risen Christ and to believe in our heart that the same experience of Christ that they have had, may be ours by faith as well.

We see here 2ndly – Jesus' gentle reproof of Thomas and His believing response. (Verses 26-28)

"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!'" "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.” “And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” You can see here that Jesus took Thomas up on all of his conditions which he had laid out in his unbelieving mind. He didn’t have to reveal Himself to Thomas in this way. But He knew Thomas, and He knew that if He stood in front of him and repeated back to him in his very words, the conditions which Thomas had stipulated, that he would not only be convinced, but that he would be sufficiently convicted and ashamed of his unbelief. The conditions included Thomas’ putting his finger in the nail prints in his hands; of reaching with his hand and putting it into his side. But Jesus knew that Thomas would not need to do that if he spoke to him in this gentle way of reproof. You see, Thomas was not only immediately convinced, but he was immediately repentant. He was not only immediately convinced, but he was immediately ready to confess Him openly as his Lord and his God. What a beautiful scene this must have been for everyone there to behold. The Lord knew what Thomas must have to become a fervent witness to Himself. He knew what situations of difficulty that he would have in his witness later in his life; when he would lay down his life for the gospel in India. Tradition has it that that is where he went and suffered great persecution and a horrible martyrdom for his Lord. This appearance was everything he needed to equip him for his future ministry. Many of the Apostles needed to be reprovved for their unbelief during this time period. You see this in Mark 16: 9-14. “Now on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.” She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept.” “And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe.” “After that He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country.” “And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either.” “Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.” Let us learn from this that our faith is something that needs to be nourished and strengthened in order for us to go on to serve our Christ. Our Lord will come to us and help us with this as we believe in His words, and in His promises, and in the testimony of the experience of other believers; which they give to us, telling us of His wonderful power at work in their lives.

And then finally – Let us remember this last Beatitude which Jesus gave to all of His disciples then, and also to us here today.

Verse 29 – “Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed.’” “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Here is a special blessing to those who will live by faith in the unseen Christ. Blessed are those who have not seen the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ; and yet they still believe. It does not have to be proved to them in a fleshly way; although every believer will one day see and touch and their hands handle their risen Savior and Lord. No, every believer is walking with Christ closely now, when they are like the

disciples described by Peter in 1 Peter 1: 8 – “...whom having not seen you love.” “Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.” Do you believe in Christ in this way; rejoicing in Him; knowing that He is in you, and with you, and for you, and that He will never leave you nor forsake you? Lo, He is with you always even to the end of the age. If you do not know the reality of this walking with the unseen Christ now; you surely may if you will ask Him to come into your heart and save you from all of your sins. Those who do so come to know the reality of His presence and power in their lives. This gift of salvation and eternal life comes for the asking. When you ask Him, He sends His blessed Holy Spirit to come and live with you forever. He becomes Christ in us, the hope of glory. I am thankful for my Savior and Lord; that He is with me always. On a plaque in my dining room, these words are written: “Christ is the head of this house, the unseen Guest at every meal, the silent listener to every conversation.” He is risen indeed and we are blessed indeed if we believe in Him; our unseen Lord!