

## Resurrection- The Promise of Living Faith

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Text: John 20:24-29 (Thomas meets Jesus after the resurrection)

The disciple Thomas, after Jesus died, was in a state of total collapse of spirit and morale having staked his all and his future on Jesus. Having his hope nailed to a cross and his future drained out, he must have felt totally lost, without anything to live for. That may be why he withdrew from the other disciples to grieve alone. Thomas had been the lone disciple who spoke up when Jesus announce that he was going back to Judea and Jerusalem where there was a price on his head, "Let us go and die with him."(11:16) We see no doubt in him here contrary to how he has so often tagged "Doubting Thomas." He seemed to be one of those persons who may take a long time to convince, but when they are, they are totally committed. He was absolutely convinced and committed to Jesus as his best hope, even if it meant dying with him. For Thomas, what was at stake was **the kingdom Jesus promised to deliver for Israel freeing them from the iron clutch of the Roman Empire?** If Jesus thought is was that important then, for Thomas, it was a cause worth fighting for, even dying for. That, my friends, is **NO DOUBTER.**

At their last supper together in the upper room Jesus took the occasion to prepare his disciples for what was about to happen. He knew they would be shocked and dismayed by what they would witness. How do you prepare your dearest, most loyal friends for what they will certainly interpret as utter defeat of a cause they had left everything for? Jesus chose to talk about hope for the future. He told them he was going away but he assured them that they would know the way to where he was going. Good old faithful Thomas, who held nothing back, blurted out, "How can we know the way if we don't even know where you are going?" Then Jesus put it in terms they should have understood, that he was going to the Father in heaven. "I am the way, the truth and the life - the one sure way to the Father in heaven." Did they get it? Not yet. But, what he needed them to do was to stay together and support each other through their grief until he reappeared after the resurrection. For the next three chapters in John's gospel Jesus is preparing them pointing beyond his resurrection and departure to the task of their lives set before them and their final glorious reunion.

What did the other disciples do after the resurrection? They stayed together. That's where they were when Cleopas and the other disciple ran back from Emmaus to tell how they had seen Jesus. Together they saw Jesus when he first appears to them as a group, all but Thomas. Jesus was concerned about him. He knew him well and understood how difficult it would be for him to handle his emotions. It must have taken the others a full week to convince him to come back to the "family."

Shock and grief are very powerful experience in anyone's life. Many of us know that personally. Some people naturally draw strength from friends and family to help them through the pain. Some try to go back to their daily routine right away to take their minds off their grief, and sometimes in denial of it. Elizabeth Kubler Ross was the pioneer in her field who helped us understand the process of grief people often go through when they suffer a life-changing loss like experiencing a fatal disease or the death of a loved one. You may have heard of the five stages of grief that many persons experience: denial, anger, bargaining, depression/sadness, acceptance. These are perfectly normal though not everyone goes through them all or in the same order. But, sometimes a person may get stuck in one of the stages before they get to acceptance like Thomas who withdrew. That can be very difficult to get out of. As you think about it, someone you know may have experienced some of these stages in their grief process.

I believe Thomas was stuck in his angry and depression falling into deep despair making him rather

irrational. When the other disciples told him they had seen Jesus with their own eyes and were absolutely certain that he was no longer dead but was very much alive. They had even eaten with them, as absurd as it may have sounded. Their certainty and excitement would have been enough to convince practically any emotionally healthy person. Thomas felt he would only be convinced by touching Jesus' actual torn flesh - an equally absurd demand. **He was not in doubt, but despair.** As it turned out, it did not take such extreme measures to convince him when the risen Christ did appear before him in the flesh.

**The power that brought forth Jesus from the depths of his tomb into the glorious light of the resurrection also brought Thomas out from his despairing darkness into a radiant living faith.**

He was so utterly convinced that he answered with the confession, "My Lord and my God!"

There is a non-scriptural book called *The Acts of Thomas* that offers the legend of what happened in Thomas' life after that. It tells of how Jesus sent him to carry the gospel to India, though he refused more than once. But, in the end he was instrumental in winning a king to faith in Jesus Christ and successfully establishing Christianity there called "The Thomist Church" which continues today.

Elizabeth Kubler Ross once said,

*The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity and an understanding of life that fills them with compassions, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.*

Thomas had experienced the greatest loss of his life, all his hopes and dreams died with Jesus. God's power of the resurrection transformed Thomas' dead faith into a beautiful living faith that empowered him to spread the light and love of Christ across the world.

During the Thirty Years' War in the 17th century, the German pastor Paul Gerhardt and his family were forced to flee from their home. One night as they stayed in a small village inn, homeless and afraid, his wife broke down and cried openly in despair. To comfort her, Gerhardt reminded her of Scripture promises about God's provision and keeping. Then, going out to the garden to be alone, he too broke down and wept. He felt he had come to his darkest hour. Soon afterward, Gerhardt felt the burden lifted and sensed anew the Lord's presence. Taking his pen, he wrote a hymn that has brought comfort to many. **Give to the Winds Thy Fears**, UM Hymnal #129; Paul Gerhardt and William H. Walter

*Give to the winds thy fears;  
Hope and be undismayed.  
God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears,  
God shall lift up thy head.*

*Through waves and clouds and storms,  
God gently clears the way;  
Wait thou God's time; so shall this night  
Soon end in joyous day.*

It is often in our darkest times that God makes His presence known most clearly. He uses our sufferings and troubles to show us that He is our only source of strength. And when we see this truth, like Pastor Gerhardt, we receive new hope. Are you facing a great trial? Take heart. Put yourself in God's hands. Wait for His timing... Our Daily Bread, May 7, 1992.

Jesus waited in the grave three days. For the disciples waiting must have felt like a lifetime, for Thomas it must have felt like forever. Wait and hope for God, no matter how dark or how long it takes.

**God's power of the Resurrection -**

**It raised Jesus, It transformed Thomas, It sustained Pastor Gerhardt and his family**

**It is God's power for us to bring us through whatever we face to LIVING FAITH.!**