

Conditions for Belief

John 20:19-31

Introduction

I've said before that Thomas wasn't the only follower of Jesus who had to see Him after the resurrection to believe. So, maybe we should cut him some slack? According to **v. 31** of our Gospel lesson: *these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*, all that's necessary for belief is the apostolic testimony, which is what we have in Scripture. Thomas had that, as the other ten were telling him, *"We have seen the Lord!"* (**v. 25**). His words are very strong, *"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe"* (**v. 25**). He is adamant in setting the conditions under which He will believe in the resurrected Jesus. At the same time, we must remember that this is doubt. And doubt is not sin. Remember the father of the demon-possessed boy in **Mark 9**, who said, *"I believe; help my unbelief!"* (**Mark 9:24**). Thomas believed in Jesus enough to follow Him; he needed help to believe in the risen Jesus. Let's take a closer look at what was going on with Thomas.

The Importance of Being Together

The first problem Thomas had was not being there when Jesus appeared to the eleven. Was he out on a snack run? We don't know much about his personality, but it's possible that it was too much for him to be with the others and went off by himself to grieve. The point is, if Thomas had been there, he would have seen Jesus, and would never have said those fateful words that branded him for all time as a doubter. This speaks to the importance of coming together. We gather to worship for a reason. We hear Jesus in the Word and see Him in the bread and wine. We also come together in fellowship. When we miss church, we never know what we miss until it's too late. It may have been the word from Scripture we needed to hear. It may have been the uplifting voice of a brother or sister in Christ to help us along the way. It may have been a hymn that would have been especially helpful to us. We know we miss out on the Sacrament. Being absent is never a good thing.

It's Only Fair

This may have been going through Thomas' mind, too. "I've been a follower of Jesus for as long as you have. You got to see Him. It's only fair that I get to see Him, too." Maybe Thomas just wanted fair and equal treatment.

Faith on My Terms

Thomas was saying he would believe only on his terms. If his conditions weren't met, he would never believe. This was not just "putting out a fleece." There's a difference between that and tempting God. (Read **Judges 6:36-40**) Gideon believed in God; he just wanted to make sure he heard God right. He wanted to make sure of what he was supposed to do. Thomas didn't believe and was saying that God must prove Himself. Saying you are to move if your house sells in the first week on the market is putting out a fleece. Saying you'll only believe in God if He gives you a sign is tempting God.

God Complies, but ...

Jesus didn't hold this against Thomas. He came again when Thomas was there and met him on his own terms. This shows a love and patience on His part that few of us would have. But he didn't let Thomas off the hook, either. Jesus told him that He knew what Thomas had said. Before anyone had a chance to say anything, Jesus said, *"Peace be with you."* Then he said to Thomas, *"Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe"* (v. 26-27). Then He chided Thomas for needing proof.

Faith Comes by Hearing

Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"* (v. 29). He knew that anyone who comes after will have to believe on the testimony of these eyewitnesses. As St. Paul says in **Romans**: *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (10:17)*. That's why John's purpose statement for writing his Gospel is *that [we] might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, [we] may have life in His name (v.31)*.

The Visible Word

We have the Written Word of God to work faith in us so we can believe. We also have the visible Word, the body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine. They are there because the Word of Christ says so. He has given these gifts to strengthen our faith. These are God's **CONDITIONS FOR BELIEF**. Receive them today.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
