

## When Confession Is Complete (John 20:19-31)

Several years ago, an actress, after a lifetime battle with alcohol and drugs, as well as a few attempts at suicide, was taken to a hospital emergency room. For the first time, she pleaded, "I want to live." It seemed a paradox, for up to that moment she seemed bent on self-destruction.

Some modern interpretations suggest Thomas, an apostle of Jesus expressed a similar positive desire: "I want to believe!" when he said "I will not believe, unless I see..." These modern interpretations suggest his doubt stemmed from a deep desire to believe, but an inability to do so without proof. Thomas, sometimes called "the doubter," was not having an easy time believing that Christ had been raised from the dead. He had not been with the other disciples when Christ first appeared to them. A week later, Christ appeared before the disciples again, and this time Thomas was with them. This time, the proof that

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he had demanded was thrust before him. And this time he confessed. Having seen the Lord, he did not need the further proof that he had earlier demanded. Falling before Jesus, Thomas' confession was complete: "My Lord and my God."

Notice Thomas' reaction to Jesus' death. He separated himself from the disciples' fellowship. How could he have believed? He would not subject himself to the things that would help him believe. Things like the fellowship of other believers, the witness to the resurrection, the presence of the Christ, the encouragement and hope of others—all these were things that Thomas missed because he would not join himself with the fellowship of believers.

How often those to whom belief comes hard would be encouraged in their belief if they would become part of the fellowship of believers. Outside the fellowship, one does not have strength and encouragement to believe.

Inside the fellowship, one is helped by the others who believe.

Can persons be blamed for their unbelief? Persons are to blame when they stand in their own light. When they cast such a shadow that they cannot see the light that God brings to them, they can assume the blame.

Persons can also assume the blame when they won't come to where the light is. By Thomas' carrying his burden and nursing his hurt alone, he missed the very presence of Christ when he needed it most. Had he come to where the light was, he could have seen the light.

Did you catch the note of criticism in Jesus' words to Thomas in verse 27 when he asked him to reach out his hands to touch the nail prints and then said, "Stop doubting and believe?" We often put

ourselves in positions in which it would be natural for the Lord to criticize us.

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We are in a position for criticism when we take a negative response to reality. By this time, the resurrection was not a supposition but a reality. A number of the disciples had given witness to the resurrection.

Why would we make such a negative response to the reality before us? It may have to do with habits, morals, or lifestyle. Persons may have adopted such a lifestyle that spiritual reality can hardly reach them. Or it could have to do with companionship. Persons may find themselves in such company that a positive response seems impossible. It could even have to do with disposition. Some people find it easy to believe. For others belief is difficult.

There was once a story of two buckets in a well. One of them said that no matter how full he came

up, he always went down empty. The other bucket said that no matter how empty he went down into the well, he

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always came up full. They were looking at the same facts through different dispositions.

We are in a position for criticism when we shut the door to the evidence of reality. Thomas shut the door to all the evidence of reality except those that could be grasped by the senses. If he could not see or feel something, he would not believe it. He had failed to recognize that God can work in ways other than the physical senses.

Is there anything we can do when we find ourselves in a position of criticism from the Master? Yes, there is. We can take what the late preacher Sam Shoemaker called “the faith experiment in life.” He observed that in an experiment in chemistry, when one mixes two ingredients, a certain result will occur. The faith experiment is much the same. It is to

begin acting as though you had faith. It is to begin acting as if you

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believe God exists by praying. Ask him for guidance during the day for solutions to knotty problems in life. Act as though you have faith. It is known that doubt of any sort cannot be removed except by action.

How much better off Thomas would have been had he acted on faith rather than brooded over doubt.

Recognition of Jesus shows reality. Here we get to the heart of the story. When Thomas saw Jesus, he realized how absurd his demand was. The recognition of Jesus shows reality. Thomas wanted proof. All he needed was to see Jesus.

The reality of life for which we are seeking is found in Jesus Christ. In Christ we can know the power of God at work in our hearts as he gives meaning to life.

When he saw Jesus, Thomas confessed Christ. His confession was tentative until this time; but upon seeing Jesus, he made a complete confession, confessing him not only as God, but also as Lord of his life.

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Lew Wallace, who was not a believer in Christ at the time, once talked with Robert Ingersoll, a noted atheist, who attacked Christianity. Wallace declared that he was doing to read the New Testament and find out about Christianity for himself. For six years, he studied it carefully. Then he wrote the famous novel, Ben Hur. His personal testimony was that, after thoroughly studying the sacred Scriptures, he had come to the conviction that Jesus Christ is the Messiah of the Jews. The Savior of the world, and his own personal Redeemer.

The confession that Christ asks of us is the “complete confession” that Jesus is both Lord and God. This involves the theological confession of him as God incarnate. And it involves the personal

confession that he is Lord of life. Can you make that confession today? Will you step out of your indecision and tentativeness to confess Christ fully now?

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So, what are the lessons we can learn from this Scripture reading in John 20:19-31?

This Scripture reading of John 20:19-31 teaches that Jesus brings peace, forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit to overcome fear and doubt, transforming locked-way disciples into commissioned witnesses. Key lessons include believing in Jesus as the Messiah without needing physical sight, receiving his mission to share peace, and understanding that grace meets us in our skepticism.

Please bow your heads as I pray.

Risen Lord Jesus, who entered the locked room to bring peace to your fearful disciples, enter the locked rooms of our own hearts today. Where we are afraid,

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bring your peace. Where we are doubting like Thomas, bring your presence.

Thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit, breathing new life into us. Help us to believe, even when we have not seen, and to trust that you are our Lord and our God.

Strengthen us to go forth, as you have sent us, to be witnesses of your grace and to bring your peace to a divided world. We ask this in the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**