Doubting Thomas

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It is remarkable that one of the disciples should have been absent from the assembly on the evening of the day Christ rose from the dead. What was the cause of his absence it would be worse than useless to conjecture. But the intention of Providence in it is obvious. It was to display the natural unbelief, as to the things of God, that is in the heart of man; and to teach us the kind of evidence that God accounts sufficient for His saving truth.

Why was one of the disciples absent? Why was this disciple Thomas? The narrative itself affords an answer to both questions. Divine Providence intended to give us a specimen of unbelief even in His own people. Thomas was peculiarly incredulous; therefore he was the person fitted to act the part designed for him on this occasion. If Thomas was afterwards convinced, there was no room left for captiousness to allege that the fact of Christ's resurrection was received by the disciples on slight grounds, without sufficient evidence and caution.

The unbelief of Thomas was unreasonable and sinful in a degree beyond expression. Why did he not believe the united testimony of the other apostles? He should have received the testimony of any one of them. Unbelief justly exposed him to eternal condemnation. Has Thomas a licence for unbelief, more than any other of the human race? Must he not be liable to condemnation on the same ground with the rest on mankind? Must he be satisfied in his own whims with respect to the evidence of this fact? Can he say with innocence, "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"? Did ever any infidel express a more unreasonable demand for the evidence of Christ's resurrection, and the truth of Christian religion? The demands of sceptics are moderate and sober, compared to this intemperance of unbelief. The most unreasonable of them demand only that a particular revelation of the gospel should be made to every man. This falls far short of the extravagance and unreasonableness of the unbelief of Thomas.

But there is wisdom in this madness. If Thomas is unreasonable, God uses his unreasonableness to effect a great purpose. By this means, in the satisfaction given to Thomas, we have the fact of the resurrection established on evidence beyond all suspicion. The possibility of delusion is removed and the reality that it was Jesus whom the Apostles saw, rests not merely on the testimony of their eyes, but of the hands of the most unreasonable unbeliever that ever was in the world. Of all the infidels that

ever existed, Thomas was the most extravagant. Voltaire and Hume are men of moderation, compared to this prince of infidels. Nothing will satisfy this philosopher but the handling of the prints of the nails in His Master. Was it not possible that the risen body of Jesus should have had no scars? Was this not the most likely thing to be expected? That Almighty power that could raise Him, could raise Him without a mark of His crucifixion. But Thomas was in all respects unreasonable; that through this Jesus might exhibit Himself with evidence of His resurrection, that the most extravagant incredulity could presume to demand.

By this providential fact the Lord teaches us that His own disciples believe in Him, not because they are naturally more teachable, or less incredulous than others. It is God only who overcomes their unbelief. They are not only by nature the children of wrath even as others; but after they are brought to faith and life, the only security of their perseverance is the favour and love of God in Christ. They are kept by faith, and that faith is not of themselves, but is the gift of God. The strongest of all the disciples of Christ would not abide in the faith for a single day, if like Peter or Thomas, they were to be given up to their own natural unbelief. But if the strongest would not stand in their strength, the feeblest will not plucked from the hand of the heavenly Father. After the fearful example of Peter and of Thomas let no disciple of Christ trust in his own steadfastness. We are strong only when, seeing our own weakness, we have our strength in the Rock of our own salvation.

In this providential fact, we see the forbearance and condescension of Christ to His people, even when they are unreasonable. He graciously removes the doubts of Thomas, though He might justly have left him to perish in his presumptuous unbelief. From this we may be assured, that, in one way or another, the Lord will remove the doubts of His people with respect to the evidence of the gospel. If He will not give them that evidence which extravagance may rashly demand, He will keep them from such extravagance, or remove their doubts by opening their eyes to understand the proper evidence.

This will be the same thing with presenting to their view and to their touch His hands and His side. He will assuredly overcome the unbelief and hardness of heart of the most obstinate of His chosen ones. If He was not provoked to give up Thomas, His patience cannot meet with a more extravagant case of incredulity. He could call a Saul of Tarsus in the midst of his furious enmity to Him and He did overcome the unbelief of the incredulous and obstinate Thomas. What a consolation is this to the believer! What thoughts of unbelief arise in the heart!

Our Lord, even though, for His own wise purposes, He indulged Thomas, yet did not approve of his unbelief, nor of his demand. He did not ascribe

his incredulity to greater talents, or greater caution, or greater concern about the truth, than were discovered by his brethren. On the contrary, He shows that they rather are blessed who will believe without such evidence than Thomas demanded. There are two extremes, equally to be avoided, into which men are prone to fall. Some believe without evidence, believe against all evidence, believe what all evidence, capable of being submitted to the mind of man, shows to be absurd and impossible. On the other hand, there are some who unreasonably refuse evidence that is sufficient, evidence that God has pronounced sufficient, and look on themselves as manifesting greater intellect, or greater wisdom, in demanding evidence of another kind, which God has not appointed. "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

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