

Dedication, Doubt, & Declaration:
A Graveside Service for Mrs. Joan Jacoba Elshout
May 13, 2013

Introduction

Before proceeding to God's Word, allow me to first commend my dear father-in-law for his forty years of faithful and patient love for his wife. Dad, thank you for the good example that you have left to us your children. You kept the vow that you had made to your wife on your wedding day—to love her in sickness and in health. I understand that without God's grace, you would not have been able to love her in this way; therefore, praise God for His grace upon you.

Let's now read our text for this short meditation—John 20:24-28.

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." ²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Sadly, we remember Thomas as "Doubting Thomas." But, as Joshua Harris asserts, "God didn't give the name 'Doubting Thomas', we did. God never defines us by our failures. He defines us by the perfection of his Son." In the gospel God defines us not according to our sin but according to His Son's righteousness.

You might ask, "What is the gospel?" Interestingly, in Mark 1:15 Jesus says, "[R]epent and believe in the gospel" and you will be saved. Then when the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" they replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved..." (Acts 16:30-31). Notice that Paul and Silas did not say, "Believe in the gospel," but instead, "Believe in the Lord Jesus." Observe also that Jesus says, "[B]elieve in the gospel," and not "believe in me." Here then we see that the gospel and Jesus Christ are essentially synonymous. The gospel is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the good news. And here is the good news: He "came to seek and to save the lost" (John 19:10).

Upon my mother-in-law's request, I would like to proclaim this gospel to you. And I can only preach the gospel if I preach Christ to you. My mother-in-law would have agreed with Charles Spurgeon who rebuked ministers that did not preach Christ: "Leave Christ out? O my brethren, better leave the pulpit out altogether. If a man can preach one sermon without mentioning Christ's name in it, it ought to be his last, certainly the last that any Christian ought to go to hear him preach."

This brief message will present the gospel by looking at Thomas's life under three headings: (1) his dedication, (2) his doubt, & (3) his declaration.

I. His Dedication

In John chapter 11 Lazarus whom Jesus loves is sick. Actually, as the story progresses we discover that Lazarus eventually dies. Jesus wants to go to Judea to revive Lazarus, but listen to what His disciples tell Him:

⁷ Then after this he [Jesus] said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” ⁸ The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?” ¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Please note Thomas’s remarkable dedication to his Master. He is courageously willing to die with Jesus. He is loyal to the Lord’s work. To some extent my mother-in-law was like Thomas. She was also committed to the service of the Lord. Her passion was to serve others. In fact, even when she was sick, she was still thinking of how she could minister to others. When she became severely ill, she was greatly disappointed that she could no longer help others, especially an older lady who became like a mother to her. No one who knew my mother-in-law would question her dedication to the Lord’s work. She evidently loved the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, like Thomas, although she had a strong commitment to Jesus, her faith in Him was weak. Like Thomas, she also struggled with doubt.

II. His Doubt

In our passage, the dedicated Thomas shows his doubt to the testimony of his fellow disciples concerning the resurrection of Jesus. Thomas tells them, “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). Before Jesus died, He Himself had informed Thomas of His resurrection (Mark 8:31). Thus we learn that you can be dedicated to the Lord’s work, and at the same time doubt His word. Are you like Thomas—dedicated and yet doubting? You actively serve God, but doubt His promises. You faithfully attend church services every Sunday, but you doubt the gospel promise that if you believe in Jesus you will be saved.

Nevertheless, despite his doubt, Thomas is an honest seeker of truth. He does not want to remain in his state of doubt. He eagerly looks for the truth. Do you recall his dialogue with Jesus in John 14:5-6? In this passage the confused Thomas asks Jesus about the way to His Father’s house—the way to heaven:

⁵ “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Thomas doubts, but he is not content to remain doubting. He wants to be certain, especially of matters pertaining to everlasting life. Sadly, some Christians seem to be content to stay in the place of doubt. They don’t seek the truth. Perhaps you are struggling with assurance of salvation. Well, seek the truth that will set you free from the bondage of doubt. Read books about assurance of salvation. Attend bible study where your faith can be strengthened. Learn more about the gospel promises. Attend a church where the gospel is preached faithfully. Charles Spurgeon once mentioned, “Many a believer lives in the cottage of doubt when he might live in the mansion of faith.” My friend, you do not need to live in the cottage of doubt. Leave that place and live in the mansion of faith.

You might ask, “Can I really know if I am saved?” Oh, yes, my friend, you can! As John the Beloved articulates, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13). Take note, the Bible has been written in order for believers to have absolute knowledge of their salvation in Christ. Can you honestly sing with Fanny J. Crosby?

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

Now it is not necessarily true that once you become a Christian, you will never experience doubt. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains in his book *Spiritual Depression*, “Doubts are not incompatible with faith.... Some people seem to think that once you become a Christian you should never be assailed by doubts. But that is not so, Peter still had faith (as he panicked in the storm in Matthew 14).... His faith was not gone, but because it was weak, doubt mastered him and overwhelmed him and he was shaken.... Doubts will attack us, but that does not mean that we are to allow them to master us.”

With love let me challenge then those of you who are like Thomas. Are you allowing your doubt to rob you of the joy of assurance of salvation? Are you allowing your doubt to keep you from growing in your faith in Jesus? Are you making an effort to stay away from the cottage of doubt? Again, like Thomas, my mother-in-law struggled with doubt, but she strove for assurance. She wanted to be certain of her salvation. Thankfully, after a long struggle, she experienced full assurance of salvation and could echo Thomas’s declaration.

III. His Declaration

Thomas doubted. But, look what he declares in our text after he has been confronted by Jesus, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). This confession is the clearest confession on the deity of Christ. Of all the twelve disciples, only Thomas explicitly calls Jesus *God*. In this sense, Thomas has surpassed his fellow disciples.

Notice the personal and possessive pronoun “my” in Thomas’s declaration: “My Lord and my God.” What Thomas is saying here is this: “Jesus is my Lord and my God, and I am His. Jesus belongs to me, and I belong to Him.” There is no more doubt here but assurance. Two days before my mother-in-law died, my wife and I sang for her the famous hymn “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.” Despite her extreme fatigue, my mother-in-law still sang with us:

“Great is Thy faithfulness,” O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

For many years my mother-in-law had struggled to call God her Father. Now by God’s grace she could prayerfully sing with full confidence, “O God my Father!” What a confession! What an assurance! Can you say by God’s grace that God is your Father, too? John 1:12 says, “But to all who did receive him who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” Oh, I urge you, my dear friend,

to receive Jesus by faith; and you will be given the right to become a child of God. Are you His child, or the Devil's?

Remember what Jesus says to the proud and self-righteous Pharisees in John 8:44, "You belong to your father, the devil." They belong to Satan because they have not received Jesus. Have you received Jesus Christ as your only Lord and Savior? Consider this verse—"Jesus receives sinners" (Luke 15:2), but you must receive Him, too.

On her death bed, shortly before she died, my mother-in-law prayed with her hands lifted up toward heaven, "Lord Jesus....please come quickly!" Unquestionably, my mother-in-law borrowed her prayer from John the Beloved who pleads in Revelation 22:20, "Come, Lord Jesus!" This is a prayer of a true believer who longs to be with Jesus Christ. This was my mother-in-law's last prayer.

Amazingly, my mother-in-law had a calendar that provided her a daily verse. The verse that she was supposed to read on the day she died was John 14:18, "I will not leave you as orphans [or comfortless]; I will come to you." Indeed, Jesus heard her request. He came quickly and gently to take her home to be with Him. What a comfort and joy to know that she is now with her Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! She is now free from sin and sickness. Also, it is a comfort to know that Christ bought not only her soul but also her body. As the Heidelberg Catechism so beautifully states in response to the question: "What is your only comfort in life and in death?"

That I am not my own, but belong body and soul, in life and in death to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil....Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

This body then in the coffin that we are about to bury is Christ's. He purchased it, and it will someday be changed into an immortal one (1 Cor. 15:51-54). On the great day of the resurrection of the saints, this mortal body will be raised from this cemetery to be with the Lord forever and ever and ever. It is with this glorious doctrine of the resurrection that the Apostle Paul exhorts us to comfort one another (1 Thess. 4:18). Hence, as we bury my mother-in-law's body, we do not need to say *goodbye* but only *good night* to her; for we believers shall see her again in heaven. May the precious reality also that her soul is now in heaven sweeten our sorrow! She is now in a far better place than we can imagine (Phil. 1:23).

Conclusion

Let me close this message by simply asking you: Do you belong to Jesus? Does He belong to you? Is He your Lord and Savior? If not, and you were to die today, you would go to hell for eternity. Oh, once again I beg you to come to Jesus by faith and be saved. Jesus promises, "[W]hoever comes to me I will never cast out" (John 6:37). Therefore, with the words of the hymn writer Joseph Hart, I plead with you:

Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready waits to save you,
Full of pity, love and pow'r:
He is able, He is able,
He is willing, doubt no more.

Jesus says, “Stop doubting and believe” (v. 27).