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MORE CONVINCING EVIDENCE DEMANDED

"Be not faithless, but believing." – John 20:27.

THE words of our text are found in connection with our Lord's appearance to the eleven disciples in the upper room, St. Thomas being of the number. From the narrative we learn that just a week before this Jesus had appeared to His disciples, but St. Thomas was absent at the time. The ten who had witnessed our Lord's manifestation related to St. Thomas the things which they had seen; but their accounts seemed idle tales to him and he could not believe them. He said he thought they were too easily convinced, and that it would require stronger evidence than they had had to convince him. Unless he could see the print of the nails in our Lord's hands, and put his fingers into the print of the nails, and could be able to thrust his hand into the spear-wound in His side, he would not believe.

To some this might seem to be an example of extreme unbelief, an unwillingness to receive the testimony of the Ten as to the experiences through which they had passed. Yet to other minds it would not seem so strange. Some of us would find it difficult to believe from any lips that a person whom we had three days before seen dead and laid in the tomb had manifested by His presence to others that He was again alive; and especially hard would it be to believe that He had appeared when the doors were shut, and had disappeared, the doors still being shut. We rather fear that had we been in St. Thomas' place we would have been inclined to say, "Show us how that could be." We would have experienced the same difficulty, and would likely have said, "You *think* you saw something; you *believe* you are telling the *truth*, but we [R5625 : page 40] think that you have been *deceived*." We are born with differences of mental qualities, and it is easier for some to believe than it is for others.

ST. THOMAS NOT REPROVED

However, on this occasion Jesus gave the desired demonstration. His first appearance to them as a group was, we believe, on the first day of the week, and the second manifestation was given again on the first day of the week; eight days later, under similar circumstances, St. Thomas being present, Jesus said to him, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side; and be not faithless, but believing." (John 20:27.) These were the very things St. Thomas had demanded, the very proof he had required. The words of Jesus do not convey the thought of any special reproof to St. Thomas. It would seem that the fact that the Lord gave to him the desired evidence to convince him, was an indication that He did not disapprove of his demand for more convincing demonstration than the others had had before believing a statement so marvelous as that of the other ten disciples; for if it had been a thing of which He disapproved He would not have complied with St. Thomas' wish.

Our Lord did, however, say (though speaking of those of us who would live subsequently, and not of the disciples), "Blessed are they who do not see, and do yet believe." This is our position. The Lord indicates a special blessing upon those who, not seeing, would be able **[R5625 : page 41]** to believe. But we are to remember that we have testimonies and evidences that St. Thomas did not have. If we had heard that ten men had seen certain things one night, we might have wondered if they had not been in a vision, just as the transfiguration on the Mount was a vision. We might have imagined some dream or some hallucination coming upon them. Here, however, was St. Thomas, a man like a great many of us, hard-headed and practical; but when the proof was given to him, when demonstration was made, he recognized that it was not a phantom, but that the Lord stood there before him in

a body of flesh. This incident has proved a strengthener to the faith of many of us.

It is quite probable that St. Thomas was not permitted to be present at that first interview for the very purpose that there might be that demonstration, to the intent that it might be easier for some of us to believe. We can readily see that an established faith was all-important to the disciples. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." (Hebrews 11:6.) If the disciples had been in doubt about our Lord's resurrection, they would not have been able to give us clear testimony on the subject, and how would we otherwise have known the facts? Some would have believed that He ascended to Heaven, and others of us would have thought differently, if we had not the positive testimony, the proof. So the Lord purposed that these eleven disciples should be thoroughly convinced. Unless they had had absolute faith in Him as the ascended Redeemer and Advocate they would not have been prepared to receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And unless they had received the Holy Spirit, they would not have been fitted for the ministry.

These forty days, then, seem to be the most important part of our Lord's ministry; for on them depended all the success of the Gospel Message, which was to be launched, not by angels, but by men – these very men to whom He appeared – it was for them to tell what they *saw* and *believed*. For them to have lost faith and to have gone back into the ordinary affairs of life would have been contrary to the Divine arrangement.

Jesus appeared four times – once to the women on the morning of His resurrection, once later on the same day to two of His disciples who were going to Emmaus; later the same evening to the ten in the upper room; then after a week, this appearance to St. Thomas and the other ten disciples. Some two or three weeks then elapsed, in which they neither saw Him nor heard of Him.

Jesus was giving them some time in which to develop faith. They had these proofs, that He had spirit power to go and come like the wind. But He had not told them what to do, so in spite of all they had seen they thought it best to go back into the fishing business.

This was the moment for which Jesus was waiting. He knew they would have doubts and wonderments, and was on the alert to be invisibly with them to teach them a necessary lesson just as soon as they returned to the fishing business. As a result they did not catch even one fish. None were allowed to go into their net. All night long the disciples toiled in vain.

In the morning Jesus was standing on the shore. They had not seen Him for about three weeks, and at first did not recognize Him. He told them to cast their net on the other side of the boat. If there were no fish on one side, there would probably not be any on the other side; for a little distance would not make much difference. But they had had such a trying experience during the night that they were willing to do almost anything. While it did not seem reasonable that it would do any good to cast the net just a few feet further away, yet having lost all confidence, they were ready to follow the suggestion of the stranger. So they put the net down, and enclosed a great haul of fish. It was a great miracle; for the net was *full*. But it was nothing remarkable for a spirit being to make this exhibition, this manifestation, of Divine power.

By this experience the disciples were taught two great lessons – that without the Divine blessing they could not succeed even in the fishing business, the occupation in which they had been engaged all their lives. The second great lesson was that He who had been a Fisher of men had the Divine power to supply all their needs; that as He had the power to supply the fish, so He had power to supply all other needs. Furthermore, when they got to the shore, He had fish there and had cooked them – He was not dependent upon the fish in the net. Of course we do not understand

the power – it was Divine Power, unlimited power. This experience became to the disciples almost a final demonstration of Divine power. They knew that it was Jesus, although they did not ask Him. He showed them that He had all the while known just what they were doing, and that He had absolute power to give or to withhold blessings from them. It must have been a great strengthener of their faith to realize that He was as able to provide for them in one place as in another, and that they did not need to go back into the world and its pursuits; for He would be with them always, even to the end of the Age. – Matthew 28:20.

TWO GREAT FACTS ESTABLISHED

Subsequently our Lord appeared to His disciples twice more – seven times altogether. Then He ascended up on High. Later He appeared to St. Paul. By these different demonstrations Jesus thoroughly convinced His disciples of two great things; first, that He was no longer dead, that He was alive; secondly, that He had supreme power. "All power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth." (Matthew 28:18.) This great Being was their Master. He had not lost anything, but had gained much in passing into death and then out of it. So they might have great confidence in Him, and might go forth to speak of His death, of the fact of His resurrection and of His ascension into God's presence, as manifested by the giving of the Holy Spirit. But they would not have been ready to declare any of these things had they not been thoroughly convinced.

We do not think that Jesus reproved St. Thomas for His doubts. It is a great satisfaction to one whose mind happens to be of that particular kind as was St. Thomas'. Some minds require more proof than do others. Undoubtedly the whole Church has been blessed by St. Thomas' action at this time. If we had been one of the disciples and had been absent when Jesus first appeared, and had been told of it by the others we would have said, "You are

dreaming, gentlemen. In your perplexity and excitement you are telling us a fairy tale." We would wish to be satisfied and to have the sense of touch to prove the matter. Now the Lord gave us this evidence, and it is a great blessing to us.

A POWER POSSESSED BY SPIRIT BEINGS

The evidence of the resurrection of Jesus lay in the fact that there was a Person there in that upper room who had the power to come and go like the wind and to demonstrate that He was not dead by any means. That body which St. Thomas and the other disciples saw was not the body crucified and buried in Joseph's tomb, but a materialized body – with the same facial expression, the same hands, the same feet, that the human body of Jesus had. Jesus said that it was *flesh*, that "a spirit hath not flesh [R5625 : page 42] and bones as ye see me have." He had both the flesh and the bones there. – John 24:39.

St. Thomas and the others could not appreciate how a spirit could materialize a body. In fact, with all that *we* know, more than eighteen centuries later, we do not understand how it could be. We know, however, that angels appeared like men and could talk, eat and walk. We know that various evil spirit beings appeared in the days of Noah, and sought to dwell on earth as men. The disciples knew this, but they had not thought to apply this to the Lord. They were learning how to apply these things to the Lord – how a spirit being could materialize and dematerialize in their presence. This was a matter of education. Subsequently they would come to a more particular understanding of this – when they received the Holy Spirit; just as with us. When we come to a better knowledge, in this proportion the Holy Spirit has guided our understanding.

We have come to a full ability to believe these matters, although we do not understand them yet; for to understand would be to enter into the matter in a philosophical way and to know how the thing is done. We do not think that the Apostles saw the body

of our Lord in the resurrection. But what they saw was proof that He was no longer a human being, but a spirit being. To make a body suitable for the occasion was no more of a miracle than were any of the other things connected with the resurrection.

