

## THE ABSENT DISCIPLE

John 20:24

"But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came."  
John 20:24.

This twentieth chapter is one of the accounts of the resurrection of our Lord. It had been rumored that the grave was empty; it had been said that He was risen, and that the women had seen a vision of angels. Very naturally the disciples came together, attracted by their common interest in the One who had been crucified at the place called Calvary. And while they were thus assembled, Jesus Himself came through the shut door and stood in their midst. He showed them His hands and His side, thus proving the reality of His resurrection.

Christ Jesus had said, "As surely as two or three are gathered in My name, I am in the midst of them." And these disciples undoubtedly gathered in the name of Jesus; it was the name of Jesus that attracted them, the marvelous story that He, who had been crucified and laid in the grave was raised again. So they came together and "Jesus came." He was actually there, the same Jesus who had been crucified at Calvary.

It is still true that where the disciples of Jesus gather, He is always to be found. As certainly as those who believe in Him and love Him assemble, He is found in the midst. Many times we have proved this. He has been with us in the fulness of grace. What a privilege it is to be where Jesus is!

When Jesus came, He spoke to them. He always does. He is not a dumb Saviour. Many times we have heard His Word, as He spoke to our hearts. He not only did that, but He showed His hands and His feet and His side, the evidence that He who was now in life was the same who had been laid low in death, the One who died for us. What a vision that was! The Saviour extended His hands and showed them who He was.

When these disciples came they were rather gloomy. They had mourned the death of their beloved Lord. Some of them had been to the grave where they had laid His precious body; they had seen the sealed sepulchre, and the Roman guards keeping watch. They came together, so far as they knew mourning a dead Christ, and behold, He appeared in their midst, the living One. Do you wonder that it is said, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." Haven't you been glad on many occasions, when thus by faith you had seen the Lord Jesus?

They received a commission from the Lord. He said, "Peace be unto you: as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." He gave them a job to do. I do not know anything that is more distressing than idleness. The Christian who does not feel any responsibility to get something done for the Lord does not enjoy his or her religion. It is impossible.

Furthermore, "He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." How many of us could testify that we have received a fresh anointing again and again in the place where Jesus came? He comes to establish us in the faith, to commission us to do something in His name, and breathes upon us the Holy Ghost that we may be empowered for all the duties of life. That is one side of it.

At this memorable meeting all the disciples were present except two, Thomas and Judas. Of course, Judas was not expected. He had already betrayed his Lord and been whipped and scourged by remorse of conscience entirely out of this world. He had gone to his own place. Thomas was expected to be present for he was one of the twelve, the inner circle. It is a sad day for any congregation when its membership begins to absent themselves from the services. It is sad when they can be counted on to be at social functions and their places of business, but cannot be counted on when the interests

of the Kingdom are at stake. No community loses respect for a congregation until it loses respect for itself. One cannot understand people who profess and call themselves Christians, who are never found at the house of prayer. There is bound to be something wrong with your spiritual life, if that is the case.

Worship is the primary duty, and should be the eagerly accepted privilege, of every genuine Christian. But its frequent neglect is a matter of common observation, and the effect upon the absentees, and upon the Christian fellowship to which they belong, is to be seriously deplored.

The disapproving mark opposite the name of Thomas is a positive rebuke. The report "not with them" means that he ought to have been with them. He ought to have been with them, because, by the grace of God, he was what he was; one of the twelve. Some of the rest might have been excused, but not the twelve. He had chosen the twelve that they might be with Him. They had been with Him, but here was one who was absent. I need to remind you that those who occupy positions of leadership ought to be present.

Why was Thomas absent? How did it happen that he, the neediest of them all, was not there to receive the inspiration and the uplift that came from this service? Surely he was not any busier than the rest of the disciples; he had no more work to do than those who came. I don't suppose he was any more indisposed than they were. They were there, and he was absent. It surely could not have been due to indifference. Many today separate themselves from the services of their church because of deadening indifference. They are absorbed in other matters.

Thomas was not absent because he had found satisfaction elsewhere. Instead of being satisfied and happy, he was sad and miserable. Thomas was naturally a moody man, of melancholy turn. Constitutionally and habitually he looked on the dark side of things, and preferred to walk on the shady side of the street. He quit "attending church" after the crucifixion. He brooded over his morbid doubts and courted solitude and separation.

Thomas had lost hope. He believed that Christ was dead, and that the cause for which He had stood was lost. He believed that right was forever defeated, and wrong forever enthroned. For him there was not a single ray of light, nor one single gleam of hope. The bitterness of his sorrow had driven him to despair.

Thomas was not present because he did not expect Jesus to be there. As yet he did not believe that Jesus had arisen from the dead. If he had only known that Jesus was going to be there, he would have been there too.

Why is that we are not always present? As a rule, when we are absent, it is simply because we do not want to be present. Excuses enough may be ready at hand. Callers? The weather? Not feel very well? Tired? Some other attraction? Only day I have to do something else? Only day do not have, for it is God's day. These flimsy excuses will not do. "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of many is."

What Thomas missed?

1. The privilege of seeing Jesus.

For a whole week longer than the rest of the disciples he was without any assurance that he had a risen Saviour. He might have had a week of overflowing joy, like the others had, but instead of that, he nursed his gloom and his unbelief, and spent another week in the doldrums. Why? Because he did not go where Jesus had promised to meet him, and therefore, he did not see Him, and he did not hear Him, and he did not receive that breath from heaven. Many of us know what it is to have met with the Lord and gotten a new lease on life, deeper assurance, stronger faith, and a greater desire to accomplish more in the work of the Lord because we have had a personal

interview with the Master. For another week Thomas was without any testimony. The other disciples had plenty to talk about, but not Thomas, because he had not been there when Jesus came. You know full well that when you have been where Jesus is, you find it easier to bear testimony to His grace, don't you?

Thomas missed the privilege of seeing Him Who had throttled death and hell and the grave and had brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. He missed seeing Him, one vision of whose face would have changed his sobbing into singing and his night into marvelous day.

2. The thrill of a great joy.  
"Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." This joy might have been experienced by Thomas if he had only been there.
3. The gift of peace.  
To those present Jesus said, "Peace be unto you." And how Thomas needed that gift! He was in a fever of restlessness and wretchedness. He was whipped by a tempest of doubt and unbelief. And all the while he might have enjoyed "the peace that passeth understanding." But Thomas missed it because he was absent.
4. The commission to a great service.  
Jesus said unto them, "As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." But Thomas was not there to hear this commission. With the crucifixion, the great program that Christ had given them seemed to have lapsed forever. They were men without a goal. But Jesus came and recommissioned them, laid upon them again the high task of witnessing to the world. And Thomas missed the great blessing of that occasion.
5. A fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit.  
"He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." John 20:22. How close the disciples came to Him that day! How their hearts were warmed! How their hopes were revived! But Thomas missed all this.
6. A promise of success in His work.  
"Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." John 20:23.

It may be that you were once active in the service of the Lord, an enthusiastic Christian. But little by little you have slipped back until you are no longer found regularly among the worshippers in God's house. You are missing something. You are robbing yourself. Don't deceive yourself. When God's children meet together Christ still manifests Himself. And seeing Him through the eyes of faith, there comes to us a new joy and peace, a new sense of the purpose and worthfulness of life. Seeing Him there comes to us a new power for battle and for conquest. But if we miss Him, everything goes wrong.

7. The privilege of helping his fellow disciples.  
His fellow believers missed him. His vacant place was a damper to their spirits. It was a bad example for others. What an encouragement he might have been to them! One cannot rob himself without robbing others. One cannot starve himself spiritually without helping to starve others. One cannot sin alone. I don't imagine that Thomas ever thought that all the world would know he was not present when the Master came. Christ always misses us when we are not present. He not only knows when you are absent, but He also knows why you are absent. Furthermore, He knows how you are impoverishing yourself, and enfeebling yourself when you are not in attendance where and when He wants to meet you.

Here is the encouraging thing: the other disciples sought out Thomas. They did not argue with him, because they were too full of the Holy Spirit for that. They just gave

him their positive testimony: "We have seen the Lord." On the next Lord's Day, Thomas was present with the rest. Get a blessing; then go and tell people about it and where you got it. If you have really seen the Lord, and received a blessing from Him, tell others about Him and what He gives. The Master addressed the hungry heart of Thomas and he in turn exclaimed, "My Lord and my God." The real Thomas at last spoke out as he worshipped the risen Saviour. Thomas was convinced when he too saw the Lord. Let me tell you that you are really missing something when you do not come where the Lord Jesus Christ is.