

And I touched Him

The most well known story in the Bible concerning someone touching Jesus is “the woman with the flow of blood” (Matthew 9:19-21). But that is not the most startling occasion, this can be found in John 20: 24-29

...Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 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 it."

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!" 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." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

There are many questions that arise when examining this passage of scripture. The first being: "After His resurrection, why did Jesus tell Mary Magdalene not to touch Him, but later tell Thomas to touch Him?" In John 20:17, Jesus tells Mary, “*Touch Me not*”; but then later, speaking to Thomas, He says, “*Put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe*” (verse 27). Notice, the two situations mentioned here are only ten verses apart! So what is the Lord trying to teach us? These conflicting statements of Jesus can be resolved when we examine the language He employed and then consider the basic difference between the two events. In **John 20:17**, the word translated “touch” is a Greek word which means “to cling to, to lay hold of.” This wasn’t just a touch; it was a strong grip. Obviously, when Mary Magdalene recognised Jesus, she immediately clung to Him. Matthew 28:9 records the other women doing the same thing when they saw the resurrected Christ. Mary’s reaction was motivated, possibly, by several things. One is simply her loving devotion to the Lord. Mary is overwhelmed by the events of the morning, and as her grief turns to joy, she naturally embraces Jesus. Another motivation is Mary’s desire to restore the fellowship that death had broken. She had lost Him once, and she was going to make sure she didn’t lose Him again (she wanted to keep Jesus with her always). Also, Mary may have been thinking that this was the fulfilment of Jesus’ promise to return, in which case He would take her with Him to heaven. However, it was not Jesus’ plan to stay in this world always, and His resurrection was not to be seen as His promised return. That is why He tells Mary of the ascension. His plan was to ascend to the Father and then send the Holy Spirit. Fellowship with Jesus would continue, but it would be a “spiritual communion”, not a physical presence. When loosening Mary’s hold on Him, in effect Jesus was saying this: “*I know you desire to keep Me here, always present with you. I know you want everything to be just the same as before I died. But our relationship is about to change. I’m going to heaven, and you will have the Comforter in My place. You need to start **walking by faith**, Mary, and not by sight.*” Yet, when Jesus spoke to Thomas, it was not to counter a misplaced desire but to rebuke a lack of faith. Thomas had specifically said he would not “believe” until he had **touched** the living body of the Lord. Jesus, knowing all about Thomas’s declaration, was prepared to offer His body as ‘living proof’ of His resurrection. This was something He did on another occasion as well (Luke 24:39-40). Note, both Mary and Thomas needed more **faith**. Mary needed faith enough to let Jesus go. Thomas needed faith enough to believe without hands-on proof. Mary needed to

loosen her grip; Thomas needed to strengthen his grip.

The resurrected Christ Jesus gave both of them the **faith** they needed to fulfil God's plan and purpose for their lives. The difference between Mary and Thomas, and how they both responded to the resurrected Christ, accentuates the need for all of us to (a) loosen our grip and *let God be God*, and (b), strengthen our grip and *get close and personal* with the Lord. However, neither approach will work if we do not have **faith** – both Mary and Thomas needed more faith! The Lord could just as easily have said to Mary, *“Stop doubting and believe!”* After all, He'd promised not to leave her as an orphan but to send the Comforter in His place (John 14:16-18). Now, let's focus our attention on Thomas once again...

Thomas appears more than once in John's Gospel. Thomas is the only disciple mentioned by name as having been present with Jesus when the Lord raised Lazarus from the dead. This is very important because it means that in today's passage, Thomas already knew that resurrections were possible – he had recently seen one, performed by Jesus a few weeks earlier. So when his friends came up to him and said, *“We have just seen Jesus and He said to us ‘Peace’ and He breathed on us and sent us the Holy Spirit,”* I don't think Thomas was doubting that Jesus COULD come back from the dead. I think Thomas was doubting that Jesus WOULD come back.

Lazarus' death had been from natural causes, a man who had gotten sick and who, during his illness, was gently nursed by his sisters, Mary and Martha. It was natural for him to want to come back and be with them again. But Jesus?? Jesus was arrested, tortured, bloodied, and executed by those who hated him, and was abandoned and rejected in His sufferings by those who were His friends. Why on earth would He want anything more to do with this world? And when the disciples told Thomas not only that Jesus came back, but that He came back offering peace and not violence, offering the gift of forgiveness rather than retribution, I think Thomas found that too much to believe – an impossible dream in a broken world. Many of us would probably have felt the same.

However, despite his doubt, I think it's interesting that Thomas knows exactly what he would need in order to genuinely **believe** in Jesus' resurrection. It would not be enough to just see Jesus or to hear his voice, or even to touch his face. Thomas must touch the wounds of Jesus, he must be sure that this person preaching peace and being intimate with his disciples is the same person who had died upon the Cross, abandoned and murdered by the very people He came to save. Then, when Thomas touched these wounds, and he believed in the resurrection, he suddenly felt the transformation from violence into forgiveness. And as a result of his **belief**, he was able to go back to following Jesus. Right then, Thomas found the strength he needed to continue his journey with God. The moment he connected with the resurrected body of Jesus Christ – the moment he **touched Him** – Thomas obtained the **faith** to carry on! The faith to overcome!

Thomas was totally **convinced**, and legend has it that he lived the rest of his life following Jesus Christ and died a martyr's death. After proclaiming his absolute belief in the resurrection, he went out and evangelised large regions of the Middle East and India. He lived his life in the absolute certainty that, “God wins! The Almighty always wins!” He lived his life as if God really is the ruler of the universe - the One who will rule and reign forever.

What conclusion can we come to? Surely it was not by chance that Thomas was missing at first? Or that on his return he heard; and that hearing he doubted, that doubting he **touched**, and that touching he **believed**? It was by divine appointment and not by chance that events unfolded this way. Gods grace and mercy worked wonderfully, for when that doubting disciple touched his Master's wounded flesh he was cured of the "wound of unbelief." So Thomas, who actually **touched** Jesus, became a witness to the 'reality' of the resurrection.

Jesus turned Thomas's doubt into an event of **mercy** for generations to come. Out of a true repentance born from seeing Mercy Incarnate, touching the wounds of His Divine love, came those wonderful words that have formed the most profound of personal prayers for so many; **"My Lord and My God."** Thomas' doubt has revealed that we can also be healed from the wounds of all our unbelief! Thank God for 'Doubting Thomas'. The unconvinced disciple has become the model believer, an example for each one of us. So, when you find yourself questioning God (or having doubts), be encouraged, God is not phased by the way you are reacting to things. He will find a way for you to **touch** Him and be healed from all the wounds of your unbelief. Doubting God can cause hurts and injury!

Thomas experienced this profound **healing**. However, it all started with a TOUCH. The invitation to touch Jesus' wounds, resulted in his transformation. His heart must have been broken as he cried, **"My Lord and my God!"**

You may know that Jesus was from God, and even that He died on a cross for you. But the Master is inviting you to go further - to **touch** His wounds, to experience Him alive from the dead, to discover why He died for you. If you accept this invitation, like Thomas, you will be freed of all doubt and unbelief. As you **touch** the wounds of Jesus and declare that He's your Lord and your God, you'll be transformed. **Faith** for now, and faith for the future, will rise up in you as never before! So don't be afraid to get up 'close and personal' with Jesus. Yes, get close enough to **touch Him!**

And remember, this kind of profound intimacy demands that you confess "...**MY Lord and MY God!**" I'd like every one of you to stay with confidence "...**I touched Him.**"