
Lesson 58

The Appearance to Thomas

The Scripture Lesson

Luke 24:44-46; John 20:22, 24-29

When Jesus appeared to the disciples on the evening of Easter, all of the Eleven were there except one. Thomas was sure that all was lost. When the women came with reports of having seen angels at an empty tomb, and of having seen Jesus Himself, Thomas refused to believe — just as the other disciples had. But instead of spending the afternoon and evening with the rest of the disciples, Thomas went off by himself, to mourn the death of Jesus, alone.

By doing that, Thomas missed out on some very important things. The other disciples had seen the risen Lord, they heard His voice, they saw Him, they touched Him, they saw Him eat. But that was not all. Jesus also breathed on them and said, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” By that Spirit Jesus opened their understanding, so that, for the first time, the disciples were able to understand what Jesus told them about His death and resurrection.

Thomas was not there. He did not see the Lord. He did not receive the Spirit. And because he did not receive the Spirit as the other disciples had, he did not understand. And because he did not understand, he would not believe. He argued that the disciples must have seen only a spirit, not

OUR GUIDE is published by the Protestant Reformed
Sunday School Association.

the resurrected Lord at all. He said, “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.”

Exactly one week later, Jesus gave Thomas that opportunity. Again the disciples were together in a locked room. And again Jesus suddenly appeared among them. He turned at once to Thomas and said, “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.” Thomas could see that it was Jesus. And he noticed, too, that Jesus knew exactly what he had demanded — even though no one could have told Him. This was his all-knowing Master. No longer did Thomas doubt it. No longer did he need to put his finger in the nail prints, or want to do that. He believed! Jesus had risen! The Holy Spirit, whom Jesus had given to the disciples, now worked also in the heart of Thomas. “My Lord and my God,” Thomas exclaimed. He believed, really, more than he could see. For, though he could see that Jesus had risen, he could not see that Jesus was *God*. But by the faith that the Spirit worked in his heart, he believed.

Thomas saw, and then he believed. “Blessed are they,” Jesus said, “that have *not* seen, and *yet have believed*.” The disciples *needed* to see Him

stand before them, in order to believe. Soon, the *Spirit* will be poured out on the church, and then Christ will not simply *stand before* His people, but *dwell in them*. Then they will believe, though they see Him not. And that, Jesus said, will be blessed indeed.

The Miraculous Draught of Fishes

John 20:21; 21:1-13

When Jesus appeared to the disciples the first time, He not only assured them that He was really risen, He also told them what would be their life's work. They were to be His witnesses. "As my Father hath sent me," Jesus said, "even so send I you."

To the disciples, that must have seemed like an impossible task. How could *they* ever do so great a work? And indeed it was a work too great for them — too great for *any* man, if he were left to his own strength. Jesus will teach His disciples that they must put their trust in *Him*.

The disciples had gone to Galilee at the command of Jesus, and they waited there for Him to appear again to them. Peter was getting a little impatient, and, since He liked to be *busy* rather than simply to *wait*, he told his friends that he was going to go fishing. Six other disciples were with him at the time and they decided to go along.

They all got into Peter's boat and went to work. They fished with a large net, which they would together throw out into the water and then draw up again into the boat, hoping that fish would be caught in it. These men were experienced fishermen. They knew exactly where to go, when to go, and how to go about it. But all night they fished; and they caught not a single fish!

Then, in the early morning light, they saw a Man on the shore. The Man was Jesus, but they did not recognize Him. Jesus called out and asked if they had caught any fish. When they answered that they had none, Jesus said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship and ye shall find."

What good would *that* do? If there were no fish on the *left* side of the boat, there would surely be none on the *right* side! But the disciples

decided to give it a try. And when they cast out the net, it filled immediately with so many fish that they were unable even to pull it back up into the boat.

John whispered to Peter, "It is the Lord." And Peter, in his great eagerness to reach Jesus, simply jumped overboard and swam to the shore. His friends, meanwhile, stayed with the boat, dragging the net behind them as they made for the shore. And when they reached the shore they found that breakfast was waiting for them, for Jesus had miraculously provided a fire, with fish already on it, and some bread.

Jesus told them, however, that they should first take care of their catch of fish. Peter immediately went up into the boat, grabbed the top of the net, and dragged the net to shore, where the other disciples helped to pull it up onto the beach. As they removed the fish from the net, they counted them — 153 large fish! And for all that, John writes, "yet was not the net broken."

What did it all mean? Jesus had before told His disciples that He would make them fishers of *men*. These disciples must right away have understood that the miraculous catch of fish was a picture of their life's work as preachers of the gospel. They had fished all night, and had caught nothing. That is what they could expect in their preaching, if they would be left to their own skill. But the work is the *Lord's*. At Jesus' word, they had caught a multitude of fishes. So also will Christ direct them in their work as ministers of His; and by His Spirit He will work in the hearts of those who hear, and many will come to repentance and be added to the church. And not one of them will be lost. His disciples have nothing to fear.

MEMORY WORK

Group A

John 20:29 "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Group B

John 20:29b "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

ACTIVITIES

This paper has been prepared in the hope that it will be used by students of all ages. The activities are designed so that the oldest will be challenged, and the youngest will find some of it within reach. Parents should encourage their children to attempt only what they can handle without frustration. For some that will be much, for others little.

DO YOU AGREE?

If you do, write Yes; if you do not, write No.

- ___ 1. Even after they came to believe that Jesus had really risen from the dead, the disciples still needed help in understanding the purpose of it all.
- ___ 2. Jesus opened their understanding by breathing on them the Holy Spirit.
- ___ 3. The result of this work of the Spirit in their hearts was that the disciples immediately had a perfect and complete understanding of the work of Christ in the world.
- ___ 4. Thomas, one of the Eleven, was not present when Jesus thus showed Himself to the other disciples and instructed them from the Scriptures.
- ___ 5. With the clear testimony of all the other disciples, Thomas was ready to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead.
- ___ 6. Jesus next appeared to His disciples the following Sunday, when they were again gathered behind locked doors, this time with Thomas being present.
- ___ 7. Hearing Jesus' words, Thomas expressed His belief, not only that Jesus was risen, but that He was God.
- ___ 8. Some time after this appearance of Jesus to the Eleven, the disciples went from Judea to Galilee to wait for the next appearance of their Lord.
- ___ 9. While they waited for that appearance in Galilee, seven of them decided to make some use of their time by going fishing.
- ___ 10. They went, however, at night; and, because night-time is not good for fishing, they were able to catch only a few fish in their net.
- ___ 11. When morning came, Jesus called to

them from the shore and told them to cast the net on the right side of the ship in order to find fish.

___ 12. The result of their casting from the right side was that the net was immediately so full of fish that it broke and some of the fish escaped.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUNGER READERS

1. John tells us that Jesus "breathed on" His disciples when He appeared to them on Resurrection Sunday. What happened when Jesus did that? How did that help the disciples?
2. One of the disciples was not present when Jesus appeared to them the first time. Who was that? What did he say to the other disciples when they tried to persuade him that Jesus was risen from the dead?
3. On the following Sunday, Jesus appeared again to the disciples, with Thomas also present. What did Jesus say to Thomas? What did Thomas right away believe?
4. How had all of the disciples come to believe that Jesus arose from the dead? How can *we* believe, even though we do *not* see?
5. Jesus told His disciples what would be their life's work. What was that work?
6. What did Peter decide to do while they were in Galilee waiting for Jesus to appear to them? How successful were the seven disciples in their work that night?
7. The fact that they did not catch even *one* fish all night was part of the miracle. What did Jesus mean to teach them by that?
8. When Jesus appeared to them on the shore, what did He tell them to do?
9. The disciples found that their net was suddenly so full of fishes that they couldn't even pull it up into the boat. What did this part of the miracle teach the disciples? What should the disciples have learned from the fact that, even with so many fish in it, the net did not break?

COMPLETING SENTENCES

1. On Sunday afternoon, Jesus' disciples had had doubts even about the *fact* of the resurrection. Jesus' appearance to them on Sunday evening removed those doubts once and for all. However, the assurance of Jesus' bodily resurrection did nothing to remove what was for the disciples still a deep, dark mystery, namely, the *purpose* in it all. *Why* did Jesus die, only to rise again? And how does this serve the establishing of the kingdom? In order to help them understand, Jesus first of all reminded them that the events that to them were so puzzling were the very "_____ which I spake unto you, while I was yet _____ you." Not at all was it true, therefore, that Jesus had been overcome by His enemies, or by death and the grave. He had come to Jerusalem knowing full well what lay ahead, and knowing that it was the divinely appointed way — for only in that way would all things "be _____ which were written in the _____ of Moses, and in the _____, and in the _____, concerning me" (Luke 24:44).

2. The disciples had never doubted that the Scriptures spoke of the Messiah. Not yet, however, were they able to connect the Scriptures with the events of the past several days. Jesus therefore _____ their understanding, that they might _____ the Scriptures. _____ it is written, Jesus said, as He no doubt drew from the Old Testament Scriptures to preach to them the gospel of salvation through the blood of the Lamb; and _____ it _____ Christ to suffer and to _____ from the _____ on the third day (Luke 24:45, 46).

3. Very likely Jesus taught them at this time little that He had not told them before. The difference was that now He opened their understanding. This was accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit, for we read that Jesus _____ on them and said, "Receive ye the _____" (John 20:22). Thus would the disciples understand that their ability, for the first time, to comprehend this

instruction of Jesus was to be attributed not to the power of their own intellect, but to the enlightening of their minds by the power of the Spirit of Christ Himself. Thus, too, were they prepared to preach the gospel of a salvation that was by pure grace.

4. This Sunday evening appearance of Jesus to His disciples was indispensable to their understanding of the cross and the resurrection. How necessary it was must have become apparent to the Eleven when they saw the unwillingness of Thomas to believe. Thomas, one of the _____, had not been _____ them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, We have seen the _____. But Thomas, not having received the evidence of Jesus' resurrection as the others had, nor having received the Spirit as they had, continued to insist, Except I shall see in His hands the _____ of the _____, and thrust my hand into His _____, I will not _____ (John 20:24, 25). That is, until he himself could *touch* Jesus, he would not be persuaded that what the disciples had seen was in fact the *risen Lord*, rather than the *spirit* of a still dead Christ.

5. Jesus saw to it that Thomas received the evidence he wanted. For, after _____ days, when His disciples were again assembled, and _____ with them, Jesus came, the _____ being shut (that is, bolted), and stood in the _____. Then He turned directly to Thomas and said, "Reach hither thy _____, and behold my _____; and reach hither thy _____ and _____ it into my _____. And be not _____, but _____" (John 20:26, 27).

6. Thomas must have noticed immediately that Jesus used the very words of his own unbelieving demand. He was satisfied in an instant therefore that it was the all-knowing Jesus, his beloved Master, who stood before him. And his restored faith went beyond what he could see, bringing him to confess also the deity of Christ. "My

_____,” Thomas said, “and my _____” (John 20:28).

7. “Thomas,” Jesus said, “because thou hast _____ me, thou hast _____.” Those words, though addressed first of all to Thomas, applied with equal force to all of His disciples; for all had *first* seen and *then* believed. There was indeed a blessedness in the faith that came from sight. But there was something better in store for the saints of God when, after Pentecost, Christ would no longer *stand before*, but *dwell in the hearts of* His people. It was to that that Jesus pointed when He added, “Blessed are they that have _____ seen, and yet have _____” (John 20:29).

8. An important aspect of Jesus’ first appearance to the disciples was what has been called the installation of the apostles. “As my Father hath sent _____,” Jesus said, “even so send I _____” (John 20:21). How different that was from the positions of honor and power in an earthly kingdom — over which they had striven among themselves as recently as the previous week! All would not be entirely clear in their minds till Pentecost, but already the disciples must have been discovering their goals and aspirations changing, transformed by the power of the Spirit breathed on them by the Lord. Christ’s ambassadors would they be, preaching in His name among all _____, beginning at _____.

To all nations? The disciples must have wondered about the possibility of their doing such a monumental work. Jesus assured them that they need only, for now, _____ in the city of Jerusalem, until they would be _____ with _____ from on high (Luke 24:46-49).

9. It was probably not long after Jesus’ second appearance to the Eleven, that the disciples went away into _____, into a _____ where Jesus had appointed them (Matt. 28:16). Here Jesus would

provide for them a sign for assurance in their life’s work. The place was near to the Sea of Galilee (called Tiberius in John 21:1); and, while they were there waiting for Jesus to appear again, Peter said to six other disciples who were with him at the time, “I go _____.” The others quickly agreed to go with him. So together they entered into a _____, and, after fishing all night, they caught _____ (John 21:2, 3).

10. At daybreak Jesus stood on the _____; but the disciples, still in their boat, knew not that it was _____. Jesus, calling to them in a way that still gave no clue as to His identity, asked, “Children, have ye any _____?” When the disciples responded simply, “No,” Jesus advised, “Cast the _____ on the _____ side of the ship, and ye shall _____” (John 21:4-6).

11. The disciples were experienced fishermen. They knew when and how to fish. They knew too that the difference of a few feet in the location of their net could not account for the success or failure of their effort. Perhaps, however, there was something in the tone of this stranger’s voice that inspired confidence in His advice, so the disciples did as they were told ... and were not able to _____ the net into the boat for the _____ of fishes in it (John 21:6).

12. The miracle was enough for the disciple whom Jesus _____. He said to Peter, “It is the _____.” Impulsive Peter cast himself into the _____, in order to swim at once to shore. The other disciples meanwhile stayed with the little ship, _____ the net with fishes for the distance of about 200 _____ to the shore (John 21:7, 8).

13. As soon as the disciples were come to _____, they saw a _____ of coals there, and _____ laid thereon, and bread — evidently provided miraculously by the Lord. Before inviting them to sit down for breakfast, however, Jesus told them to take care of their

catch. Peter therefore went immediately into action and _____ the net to land full of _____ fishes, numbering _____. Apparently the net was not made to withstand such a strain, for we read that, for all there were so many, yet was not the net _____ (John 21:9-11).

14. The disciples were thus reminded of that previous draught of fishes, when the Lord had said to them, “_____ not; from henceforth thou shalt catch _____” (Luke 5:5). They are now reassured that the work is not theirs but the Lord’s; He gives the fruit; and He loses none of those whom He draws in the preaching.

15. Jesus then said, “Come and _____.” Evidently the form of Jesus’ appearance was somewhat different from what it had been at other times; for we read that none of the disciples _____ ask Him, Who art thou? knowing, from the amazing miracle, that it was the _____. Jesus then took _____ and gave it to them, and _____ likewise, teaching them that in their work as His ambassadors they can depend on Him to provide for their bodily needs (John 21:12, 13).

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. What purpose was served by Jesus’ reminding His disciples that what had happened during the past three days was exactly what He had before *told* them would happen?
2. Jesus gave to His disciples the Holy Spirit by breathing on them. Jesus could, of course, have given the Spirit in any way He chose. Can you tell what He probably meant to teach the disciples by that particular symbolic act?
3. As soon as Jesus “opened their understanding,” the disciples understood. That is all it took. Why, do you suppose, did Jesus not do that three years earlier?
4. On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out on the 120 gathered in the upper room. After Jesus breathed His Spirit into the Eleven on Resurrection Sunday, did they still need the outpouring

of the Spirit on Pentecost, or was Pentecost important only for the rest of the 120?

5. The expression “doubting Thomas” comes from Thomas’ insistence that he will believe that Jesus arose, only after he himself could see and touch Him. Was the doubting of Thomas in any way different from the doubting of the other disciples, or were they all equally guilty of unbelief?
6. In refusing to believe till he himself saw, was Thomas suggesting that the other disciples may have only *imagined* that they had seen Jesus?
7. When Thomas, a week later, saw Jesus, he experienced an immediate change of heart. What was it, do you think, that brought about that sudden change?
8. None of the disciples believed in the resurrection without visual evidence of it. We do. Can you explain why *we* can do what *they* were not able to do?
9. From Luke 22:24 we can tell what the personal ambitions of the disciples were with respect to their places in the kingdom. That was just three days before Easter Sunday. Read John 20:21. What great transformation, do you think, is beginning to take place in the thinking of the disciples?
10. Jesus instructed the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they “be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). What “power” would the disciples receive from the outpouring of the Spirit, to which Jesus here referred?
11. A subsequent appearance to the disciples was used by Jesus to teach them that for so great a work as that to which He assigned them, they must put their confidence not in themselves but in Him. Can you explain how the various elements in the miraculous draught of fishes served to teach this? (Think of the fruitless night of fishing, the sudden filling of the net, the net not breaking, the breakfast provided by Jesus.) For whom, do you think, did Jesus intend these various signs?
12. Casting the net on the right side of the boat had nothing whatever to do with the science or technique of fishing. Can you see any reason why Jesus would choose to accomplish this miracle through a seemingly foolish means?