

Characteristics of the Great Shepherd The Assuring Shepherd

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
The New King James Version of the Scriptures is used unless otherwise stated.]*

Last week we considered the encouraging account of the two disciples who walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and who were joined in their walk by the risen Lord Jesus Himself, who explained and opened up the Scriptures to them. Today we will consider how the Lord Jesus encouraged and reassured His disciples as a group. The key point of today's talk is how we also, living two thousand years after these events, can be and are reassured by God's word.

I'm going to split this talk up into six sections, and these are as follows:

1. Reassurance for the disciples that who they saw was truly the risen Lord Jesus Himself
2. Reassurance that His resurrection was truly according to His word
3. Thomas should have believed the report that he had heard
4. We also are to believe a report
5. The testimony that God has given us concerning His Son
6. We can be reassured

Let's start then with Section 1

Reassurance for the disciples that who they saw was truly the risen Lord Jesus Himself

I'll start by reading Luke chapter 24, verses 33 - 43 from the New King James Version. We begin with the two disciples who had travelled to Emmaus, who now went back to Jerusalem and told the rest of the disciples what had happened to them, and how they had seen the Lord Jesus.

So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread. Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you." But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marvelled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?" So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence.

It was an exciting and hope-filled time, as the news of the Lord Jesus's resurrection was spreading, and yet it was hard for the disciples to take in. One of the commentaries that I was reading likened it to Psalm 126 verse 1,

When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream.

It was wonderful, yet it seemed too good to be true. Was He really, truly risen again, in a physical body that had gone into, and come out of, death? So let's imagine the scene we just read from the Bible. As the disciples are talking about the news of the resurrection appearances of the Lord Jesus, He Himself suddenly appears right where they are, and greets them with "Peace to you." This must have been an amazing surprise!

"Peace to you" is a lovely greeting. As one author pointed out, this is the typical greeting that we read at the start of many of the New Testament epistles:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ
(This one is from first Corinthians chapter 1, verse 3).

Our God constantly reassures us that we have peace with Him, because of what the Lord Jesus has done, and so we can be reassured in His presence. He wants us to draw near. The love of God is real, and He wants us to enjoy the peace that the Lord Jesus has established for us.

But the disciples were rather terrified! They still did not fully understand the Scriptures, nor the reality of what had happened. And so, the Lord Jesus graciously reassures them, by demonstrating the reality of His resurrected, physical body. They were not seeing a vision, nor were they hallucinating nor seeing some kind of optical illusion like a hologram we might see today. The Lord Jesus was not simply there in spirit. He was there in a true, resurrected body, and to further prove it to them, He ate some food in their presence.

Let us remember too that the Lord Jesus is really and truly alive, as a resurrected Man, and that one day He will come to fetch us for Himself. He is not just an idea, nor a philosophy, but a real and living Person!

Section 2

Reassurance that His resurrection was truly according to His word

Let's now read Luke chapter 24 verses 44 - 49:

Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."

Having reassured His disciples that it really was Him, risen from the dead, the Lord Jesus now reassures His disciples that all this had been predicted by, and was a fulfilment of, His word. It was not an unexpected but happy outcome; instead, it was the fulfilment of what the Scriptures had

taught, and what He Himself had spoken to them. The importance of the Word of God really cannot be over-stated. The Word of God as a whole points to the Lord Jesus, it testifies about Him, and it explains His work and His mission. The Lord Jesus therefore gave them understanding so that they could see all those things “which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning [Himself].” A proper and full understanding of the Scriptures, which He now graciously gave them, led them to see that the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus was no surprise but the expected and intended outcome of His mission on earth.

What a blessing for us to read these words! We were not present with the disciples two thousand years ago to see Him as they did, but we have their witness and testimony, which we accept and believe. Further, we have the Holy Spirit - the “Promise of My Father” as the Lord Jesus says in this passage - who opens up the Scriptures for us, and shows us how the mission of the Lord Jesus was predicted in fine detail so many years beforehand in the Old Testament. The key thing is that God wants us to have faith in His words. “Then God said” is what we see right at the start of the Bible, Genesis chapter 1 verse 3.

Psalm 33 verses 9 and 11 remind us,

For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.
...The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations.

The Lord Jesus Himself said in Mark chapter 13 verse 31,

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

And let us not forget the first temptation of the devil, recorded for us in Genesis chapter 3 verse 1,

“Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?”

God wants us to trust in what He has said, and He has recorded what we need to know and trust in His Word. The devil’s temptation was, and is, to lead us not to trust God’s Word.

And so that was the key thing that the Lord Jesus wanted His disciples to grasp. He was risen indeed, and that was, as I said before, no surprise but the expected and intended outcome of His mission on earth. Now they would be witnesses of this truth:

“And you are witnesses of these things”

said the Lord Jesus in verse 48.

Section 3

Thomas should have believed the report that he had heard

If we now read the account in John’s Gospel, chapter 20, verses 19 - 24, we see that Thomas, one of the disciples, was not present initially.

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also

send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

We're not told why Thomas wasn't there with the rest of them, so we simply don't know. What it meant was that Thomas did not believe the report that the rest of the disciples gave him about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In John chapter 20 verse 25, we read Thomas's definite refusal:

"The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

Thomas had spent a lot of time with his fellow disciples over the last three years. He would have known them all well. Like the others, he would have heard the Lord Jesus predict His death and resurrection, for example in Mark's Gospel chapter 8 and verse 31,

And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Thomas was therefore effectively assuming that his fellow disciples were deluded, or mistaken, or perhaps even lying to him. The death of the Lord Jesus had been a terrible and sad shock to the disciples. We considered last week the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and we read in Luke chapter 24 verse 17 that they were, quite understandably, sad. Therefore, they wouldn't have joked or played around with Thomas with a subject so amazing as the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. That would have been totally inappropriate and out of character. Nor would it make sense to suppose mass delusion when the two on the road to Emmaus had seen the Lord Jesus, and the rest had independently seen Him, as had Simon Peter, as we can deduce from Luke chapter 24 verses 33-34.

But Thomas was adamant. The English Standard Version translates John 20 verse 25 as follows:

"But he said to 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."

This wasn't an "Are you sure?" kind of question, or "How do you know?" or "Has anyone else seen Him?", but a definite refusal to believe their report. We're not told how they reacted, but I suppose they must have been saddened. Perhaps they really encouraged Thomas to meet up with them all again in case the Lord Jesus showed Himself again to the whole group, and we see that he did in fact join them, as we read in John chapter 20 verse 26:

"And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!"

What a striking moment that must have been for Thomas!

**Let's move to our next section, number 4, which is that,
We also are to believe a report**

John chapter 20 verses 27 - 29 read as follows:

"Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My

hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.""

Clearly the living Lord Jesus had heard Thomas's challenge that he would not believe unless he saw the nail prints and the wound in the Lord Jesus's side. It must have been an overwhelming moment for Thomas, and to his credit, he gives a beautiful confession of just who the Lord Jesus is, "My Lord and my God". Thomas's great testimony is forever recorded in Scripture. Note that the Lord Jesus does not refuse the worship that Thomas gives Him as God. Our Lord Jesus, the Son of God, is both Man and God, which the Scripture makes clear.

It was good, obviously, that Thomas believed when he saw, but the Lord Jesus pronounces a blessing on those who have not seen yet believed. On what basis would they believe? Not because of wishful thinking, nor because of generally gullibility nor over-eagerness to believe the first thing they hear, but because of faith in a credible report and in the Word of God. And we can, and should, place ourselves in that category of persons.

The Bible is a historical document, and there is a great deal of manuscript evidence for its authenticity and reliability. There is plenty of archaeological evidence that supports the claims of the Bible. The development of Christianity is well attested historically, and indeed it would be difficult to understand history while ignoring Christianity. The Bible was authored by many different people, of very different backgrounds and living in different times, and yet it has a unifying, consistent message. It is the work of God the Holy Spirit, but it is not the work of a single human author, but that of many, who all agree. There is so much to commend the truth of the Scriptures to us, and to invite us to read it and to see what it says. Once we start reading it, we see that the Scripture itself makes promises that we can put to the test, so to speak. It tells us about a Person, the Lord Jesus, who said,

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew chapter 7 verse 7).

The Lord Jesus, whom the Bible introduces to us, declares that He wants us to know Him personally, as we read in Revelation chapter 3 verse 20,

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

Those who put their trust in the Person that the Bible tells us about, find out that what He says in it is true. They actually find Him to be exactly as He is described to be.

So, just as Thomas should have believed the genuine report of his friends, we should believe the trustworthy words of God.

Back in John chapter 4, we read about the Samaritan woman whom Jesus met at the well of Sychar. In John chapter 4 verses 28 and 29, we see that "[T]he woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

As a result of her striking testimony, we read in verse 39:

“And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all that I ever did.””

But let’s read on in verses 40 - 42:

“So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His own word. Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.””

It’s a bit like that for us. We come to the Word of God, and we are confronted with all the testimony and evidence for its authenticity and reliability. As we read it, we hear the ring of truth, and we are introduced to a Person who is at once entirely believable, and yet at the same time, no-one that anyone could ever have invented. As we put His claims to the test, we see that what He says is true and real. He is who He claims to be, and He does what He says He will do.

This brings us to section 5 The testimony that God has given concerning His Son

There is a very interesting pair of verses in John’s first letter, chapter 5, verses 10 - 11:

“He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.”

Thomas, when he did not believe his friends and fellow disciples, was, as I said earlier, in a sense assuming that his fellow disciples were either deluded, or mistaken, or perhaps even lying to him. In that sense, he simply didn’t trust them regarding their message. Now God has given us a message, a testimony, about His Son, which we have in His word. God expects us to believe what He says. Not to believe is to effectively make God out to be a liar, a dreadful thing to do. The consistent witness of the Bible is that God keeps His word. Indeed, we are told definitively in Paul’s letter to Titus, chapter 1 verse 2, that God is One “who cannot lie.” The apostle John spells out the testimony that we are to believe:

“That God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.”

Generally speaking, in this life here on earth, it pays to be cautious. With the high prevalence of scams and fraudulent tricks on the internet and so on, we need to be careful before we jump into something. Helpful advice about scam awareness warns us, very reasonably it should be emphasised, that if an offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is. The Bible itself warns us in Proverbs chapter 14 verse 15,

“The simple believes every word, but the prudent considers well his steps.”

So how does this play out regarding believing God’s testimony?

Like I said just a bit earlier, there is a great deal of evidence that supports the Bible’s authenticity and reliability. It is a document grounded in history. The lives of millions have been transformed for the better by its message. The message of the New Testament was first given out by eye witnesses to the Lord Jesus’s resurrection, and so it spread. When we come to the message of the Bible, the testimony that God has given to us about His Son, we come as part of a long line of

men and women who have believed and received the life-giving message that God's testimony contains.

Not to believe this testimony would mean that God had not told us the truth, or that the Bible is not His word, or that He does not exist, or other similar reasons. There are some well-known instances where people have seriously engaged with the Bible, actually seeking to disprove it or parts of its message, and have realised that instead, it is the truth. Lee Strobel's *The Case for Christ*, and Frank Morison's *Who Moved the Stone?* are good examples. The Bible invites us to "taste and see that the LORD is good" in Psalm 34 verse 8. The Bible, so to speak, is not afraid of honest enquiry.

So now we come to our last section, number 6 We can be reassured

The Lord Jesus, who acted as a re-assuring Shepherd for His first disciples, also reassures us. So far, we have not spoken much about the role of the Holy Spirit, but it is He who convinces us of the truth and reassures us regarding God's wonderful message. The Lord Jesus had said to His disciples in John chapter 14, verses 15 - 18,

"If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever - the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you."

And so, in a sense, we come full circle. The Holy Spirit is the One who initially convinces us of the truth of God. When we place our trust in God and believe "the testimony that God has given of His Son", then we receive the Holy Spirit, and He makes the message of the Scripture, and the present glories of the resurrected Lord Jesus, real to us. John 15 verse 26 reads,

"But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."

And again in John chapter 16, verses 13 - 14,

"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you."

We are not left on our own. The Helper reassures us and leads us into the truth.

So, let's be encouraged! God has given us a wonderful message, a testimony concerning His Son, and that testimony is true. We glorify God by believing in Him and His message, and we receive the blessing of all that God has given to us and will give to us. The Shepherd of our souls makes sure that we are reassured!

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on the Assuring Shepherd, talk number T1448. I hope it has helped and encouraged you!

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