

What Thomas Missed

Introduction. Attendance seems to be a problem in nearly every congregation. Why? There are several reasons. First, some have legitimate reasons and cannot attend. This is not the situation we are dealing with in this lesson. Nothing that is said in this sermon is intended to apply to those who by reason of sickness, or other circumstances beyond their control, are not able to attend. Second, some have a denominational background where they were led to believe that attendance is not important. They need instruction. Third, some are lukewarm. They know they should attend, but lack true devotion. Those that are able to attend but refuse to do so are the ones we address in this sermon.

There are two ways to approach attendance. The first way is to look at the severe consequences for not attending. The fear and reverence of God causes us to attend every service. The second way is to look at the benefits in attending. We are going to focus on what Thomas missed by being absent on that first day of the week after Jesus arose (John 20:19-29).

I. ***What Thomas Missed***

- A. He missed the joy of seeing the Lord.
 - 1. Jesus tried to prepare His disciples for what was coming (John 16:20-22). They had spent three years with the Lord and had seen Him die on the cross. It is difficult to understand the feelings they would have felt in those few days after the crucifixion.
 - 2. However, when they saw the Lord alive again on that Sunday, there was happiness and rejoicing (cf. Matthew 28:5-8). Thomas missed that because he was absent.
- B. He missed the comfort of other disciples.
 - 1. They had seen their Lord crucified and were probably wondering if the Jews would come and charge them with sedition as they had Jesus. They all had shared a common disappointment (Luke 24:18-21), yet their natural response was to assemble together.
 - 2. They would have been able to comfort one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11), pray for each other (Philippians 4:6-7), and study the scriptures (Romans 15:4).
- C. He missed the evidence he needed to remove doubt.
 - 1. For a whole week, Thomas remained in doubt. When Jesus came back, Thomas was not there; and the news that He had come back seemed too good to be true.
 - 2. Generally, attendance is a faith problem. The weak who look for an excuse will find one. However, the strong, who face the same problems and difficulties, somehow manage to always attend.

3. Attendance will build our faith. The disciples prayed for an increase of faith (Luke 17:5), but an increase of faith will come only by the word (Romans 10:17). How often have preachers prepared a sermon for certain ones and they do not attend?
- D. He missed the charge given by Jesus on that occasion.
1. This is the closest statement in John's account to the great commission. The Lord was committing to these men the teaching upon which remission of sins would depend. Thomas did not hear this encouraging charge because he was not there.
 2. It is entirely possible that the Lord will come during one of our worship services. What if you are not here? Will your excuse, which is evidently satisfactory to you, be satisfactory to the Lord? What if the very subject dealt with in Bible class, which would provoke your children to obedience or which was needed by them to remain faithful, was missed because you left after worship service?
- E. He missed the honor shared by being there.
1. When you talk about a doubter, who do you think of? Doubting John? Doubting Peter? No, you think of Thomas. His legacy was doubt.
 2. Even though the doubt was later removed, the scar remained. When you pull a nail out of the wall what does it leave? At our services we receive the strength to overcome temptation (Luke 8:13; Mark 14:38).

II. ***What We Gain***

- A. We gain the joy of being with the Lord.
1. Attendance is not everything, but it is a pretty good barometer to measure the strength of or any change in one's spirituality (cf. Psalm 16:11; 100:1-5).
 2. Some Christians are a lot like car engines. They miss before they quit. If you ignore the problem of missing, you will have serious problems down the road.
- B. We gain the comfort of being with the disciples of the Lord.
1. Just think of all the cursing and filthy language you hear in school or on the job; all the crime; all the depressing news, etc. There are a lot of troubles in the world and we need to edify ourselves and our brethren (Acts 9:31).
 2. Here we have a place where we find a different world, where we can escape those evils. We can draw strength from being with other Christians because we all have a common goal (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

- C. We gain evidence needed to remove doubt.
 1. Faith is developed and strengthened through examining evidence (Hebrews 11:1; John 20:30-31). We need to provide multiple opportunities for people to learn the truth and be confirmed in it (Acts 14:21-23; 15:32, 41; 18:23).
 2. Often those who do not attend regularly miss the lessons they need to build their faith. Anytime you miss a badly-needed lesson, you miss something which builds toward your salvation (Acts 20:32).
- D. We witness the application of the charge given by Jesus.
 1. Sins are still being forgiven in the same way. We attend in order to save the souls of lost men and women. Behind every number is a very precious person for which Jesus died (Matthew 16:24-26).
 2. We might miss the joy and beauty of seeing someone obey the Lord (Proverbs 11:30; James 5:19-20). Think back at the tears of joy when someone was baptized, possibly during a Wednesday night Bible class.
 3. Even the procedures of discipline can be strengthening to those who attend (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14). It is rewarding to know that the elders have conviction about God's commands and want us to be as the Lord commanded.
- E. We gain the honor that rightfully belongs to the faithful.
 1. There is a certain amount of self-esteem and honor among the faithful (Romans 12:10; 1 Timothy 3:13; 5:17). Every God-ordained service where the Bible is soundly taught, prayer is made in faith, songs are sung from the heart, and God is worshiped in spirit and truth is good. If you believe it is profitable to be present, then how can it be profitable to be willfully absent (cf. James 4:17)?
 2. Do you believe that habitually missing services will help you abound in the Lord's work (1 Corinthians 15:58; Colossians 1:10)? Do you believe that habitually missing services will help you grow in the grace and knowledge of God (2 Peter 3:18)?
 3. When our children play sports, we tell them to give it their all or else not play. Do we do the same for God? John Maxwell said, "When the morale is low, the productivity is low." By the same token, when the spirituality is low, the fruit-bearing is low.

Conclusion. Let me encourage you to never miss worship and classes, unless, of course, there is just cause. If you are someone who habitually misses services, you need to ask yourself some tough questions. Would you recommend to a new convert that they attend Bible study and other services? Would you recommend to a restored Christian that they attend Bible study and other services? Would you recommend one who rarely attends Bible study or other services to serve as an elder?

Go to work and ask them how much importance they place on attendance. Go to school and ask teachers or ask some of the parents out here how important it is for their children to attend school. What about God's work? Is that not important? Let's be diligent, attend, and encourage the brethren.

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