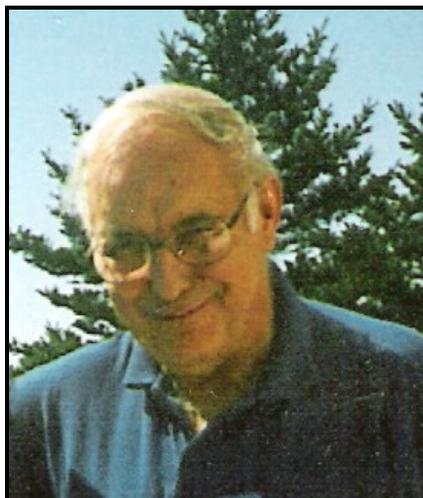


## The Self-Disclosure of Jesus

Ewen Edward MacDougall\*

\* Rev. "Ted" MacDougall was born November 19, 1935, in Charlottetown, PEI. His parents were Rev. Ewen and Edna MacDougall. He studied at Prince of Wales College in Charlottetown, and Carleton College in Ottawa, pursuing a career in science before being called to the ministry. He then attended Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, PA. While there he married Elizabeth Gill; they subsequently had three daughters and one son. In 1962 he received



a call to the Free Church of Scotland, Eastern Charge, in PEI, where he remained until his death in March, 2003. In the early years of his ministry, starting in 1968, Ted was also involved in the work of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, for which he latterly served as Atlantic Divisional Director. He was also active as an evangelist and youth and Bible study leader in Nova Scotia. In addition to these fruitful ministries, in 1979 Ted teamed up with radio producer-announcer Loren Fevens to broadcast the gospel message, "Word of Hope." This programme reached via short wave radio to countries around the world, including Lebanon, West Africa, and the former Soviet Union, as well as being broadcast by radio stations in Charlottetown and Nova Scotia. The radio message presented here was heard in the third year of this broadcast ministry.

Let us consider the self-disclosure of Jesus as found in the Gospel of John, chapter 20, verses 24 to 29. It is an account of the resurrection of Jesus and the way in which He appeared to Thomas. Jesus has appeared to the disciples and has shown them the wounds in His hands and in His side. They are all present but Thomas. Reading from verse 24 in chapter 20 of John:

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, 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. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, 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. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

How easily we can identify with Thomas! We can understand how he would want to have a personal experience of the resurrected Christ before he would believe that Jesus was truly risen from the dead. This is one of the most dramatic accounts of the Bible, and the issues at stake are vitally important. There are several things we need to notice about this account which bear on our own view of the resurrection. It is important to notice that, although all of his brethren have seen the resurrected Jesus, Thomas will not be convinced. He either believes that they have seen a spirit or hallucination or they are not telling the truth. He says that he must not only see for himself, but he must put his finger into the print of the nails and thrust his hand into the wound in Jesus' side before he will believe. In other words, he will not trust even his own eyes but will have to touch the resurrected Christ. It is understandable considering the issues involved. If Jesus is truly visibly, tangibly alive, then He is truly the Messiah and the incarnate Son of God. If He is not visibly, tangibly alive, then He was just a man and a memory in the minds and hearts of His disciples. Thomas sees the issues clearly and, interestingly enough, those issues have not changed

a bit over the centuries; but, before we consider them further, we will go on with the narrative.

After eight days, the disciples were gathered in the same place and this time Thomas was with them. Thomas has been carrying his doubts around for a whole week. Jesus comes and stands in the midst of the group and says, "Peace be unto you." Then He says to Thomas, as if He had heard his conversation with the other disciples, "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 answers and says to Him, "My Lord and my God."

We simply do not know whether Thomas touched the wounds or not. The account does not say that he did. However, he is overwhelmed at the appearance of his risen Lord. His response is: "My Lord and my God." He knows he is before the God of Israel; the God of his fathers has come to earth. It is a clear declaration from one who acknowledges that there is one God and beside Him there is no Saviour. He knows now that the Promised One has come and that His name is "Immanuel" or "God with us."

Jesus responds to his statement, "Thomas, because you have seen me you have believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." This is a message that can mean a great deal to those of us who live in the twentieth century. We are in the situation of being nearly two thousand years removed from the resurrection of Jesus Christ, yet we are expected to be believers. The question naturally comes to our minds, "How can we believe when we have no opportunity to see or touch the resurrected Christ as the apostles did? How can we have the conviction of the life of Christ when it is impossible to have the evidence they experienced?" There has been a recent trend for some to say that we cannot know the truth of the resurrection, but we can have confidence in the conviction of the disciples. We know that they experienced something, and we can trust their faith for the reality of Christ. This is far from sufficient for most of us. It is not enough for us to have faith in the faith of the apostles. It will not stand up to the modern skeptical mind and attitude of today. It is not enough. There is a way provided for the seeker of the truth.

One of the most marvelous things in the Christian faith is the fact that Jesus is alive. He is glorified at the right hand of God the Father. We are able to know this because the Spirit of God is able to bring the presence of the living Christ into our hearts. The work of the Spirit of God is wonderful and various. The gospel of Jesus Christ is borne to our hearts by the Holy Spirit. He is the author of the writings of the apostles as He brought the words and events of the life of Christ to their

minds. They wrote under His inspiration. Now He takes those same words and applies them to the hearts of those that hear the Word. He is able to convict our hearts of sin and judgment as He applies the Word. Not only this, but He also brings us to repentance and enables us to believe on Christ as our Saviour and Deliverer. Even more than this, He brings the living presence of the glorified Christ into the heart of the believer so that we are able to say that we have Christ dwelling in our hearts. Jesus teaches that if we keep His commandments, both He and the Father will come to us and will make their abode within us. This is by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

We have just described one of the greatest mysteries of Christianity, but also one of the basic reasons for its dynamic power. It would seem to the average observer or searcher for the truth of Christ that we are expected to believe a most improbable message. It is beyond reason to suppose that the great God of the galaxies, given that He exists, has come to the planet earth in the form of human flesh and has had a short ministry of three years in a tiny country on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea, died on the cross and then rose from the dead before ascending to heaven. It is fantastic to the average person to suppose that our mental attitude or belief regarding this person should determine whether or not we live with God eternally or dwell in eternal darkness. This is what the Scriptures teach and this is a capsule of what we hear when we hear the Christian gospel.

Now, if this is true, then it is literally the most fantastic thing or event to have ever happened to the earth. It cannot be overstated. There are only two routes for people to take in Christianity. Either they have to have a supernatural intervention of God in order for them to believe and enter into the salvation we have described, or they have to water down the message of the gospel itself until it has lost its original content and challenge, not to mention its blessing. And, indeed, this has unfortunately happened so that there are many who call themselves Christian who believe nothing like the original message of the apostles as we have it in the Scriptures. There are some who claim that Jesus is just a wonderful example of a man in whom God dwelt and who lived a life we can emulate and copy. The incredible demand of believing on Him as our Saviour from sin and that He rose from the dead is not even in their system. Yet, if we honestly consider historic Christianity, we realize that belief in the deity and resurrection of Christ is the very essential core of the faith.

The great secret that is often bypassed is that God is able supernaturally by the power of His Spirit to convince us and to give us the living presence of the Christ in our hearts. We thus have a dual

testimony to the truth of the resurrected Christ which is just as compelling for us as it was for Thomas to put his fingers in the print of the nails and thrust his hand into Jesus' side. The dual testimony is this: first, the illumination of the Holy Spirit to our hearts and minds concerning the truth of the gospel record of the death and resurrection of Christ; and secondly, the real experience of the indwelling Christ in the heart so that we actually know His resurrection life within our souls. These two witnesses provide us a bulwark of faith in the most amazing revelation of God to man. It would be impossible to be authentic Christians in any clear biblical sense of the word without the supernatural grace of God upon our souls. Now we can make sense of the words of Christ when He said to Thomas: "Because you have seen me you have believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." Such a faith is possible, even in the twentieth century, because of the wonderful presence of God through the Holy Spirit. He is the great convincer of Christ to our hearts, and He will illumine us and show us if we seek the Lord and ask for help. We will not be turned away because the great purpose of God is that we come to salvation through Jesus Christ. The message is for Jew and Gentile, for all upon the face of the earth.

*Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, bless us today with a new assurance of the resurrection of Jesus by the power of the Spirit in our hearts. In His name we pray. Amen.*

