

Seeing is Believing

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 23rd of April 2000. The preacher is Phil Muleman. His sermon is entitled Seeing is Believing and is from John chapter 20 verses 24 to 31.

The crucifixion was outlawed in the 3rd or 4th century. But these other disciples told Thomas they had seen Jesus alive.

They had seen Jesus alive because he had appeared to them. And he had appeared to them in the evening on the day of his resurrection, on that first day when he had risen from the dead.

Jesus had appeared to them in that evening. But, we're told, Thomas was not with them when Jesus came. We don't know why. Maybe he had something more important to do than to come together with the other disciples on that first day of the week.

We don't know why. But sadly, many people think the same today. They have more important things to do than to come together and worship the true and living God.

[1 : 21] But when Thomas did get together with the rest of the disciples the following week, and they testified about what they had seen, he refused to believe them.

And Thomas lays down the conditions in this passage for belief. He says, Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands when he was crucified. We saw the graphic presentation of it there on that video.

Unless I see the marks on his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails into my hand in his side where he was pierced with a spear, then I will not believe.

More likely, those words could be said, I will never believe it. Well, a week goes by for Thomas. And during that week, he has time for his unbelief and his doubts to fester and solidify.

And don't we know that when we have doubts about something, a week is a long time for our hearts to harden about doubts that we may have. But a week later, the disciples are gathered again, this time with Thomas present in the room.

[2 : 30] The doors are shut. They're scared of the Jews that are around them, maybe trying to get them. They're scared of being arrested. So they had the doors shut and bolted tight and so on.

But no amount of deadlocks on the door would prevent the next scene from happening though. Jesus came and stood among them and he said, Peace be with you.

Peace be with you. And the words of peace that he says here, as he did the week before and that first evening, first Easter evening, complement his last words on the cross which we read in John's Gospel, the words, It is finished.

Because when Jesus uttered those words, It is finished on the cross, and he died, it meant that he had completed all the work that he had set out to do. And there was nothing, nothing, that was left unfinished.

We're always complaining about things in our own lives that are left unfinished. Our homework, our assignments, projects at work, and so on. But when Jesus died, he had completed everything that he came to do.

- [3 : 47] And in dying, God's peace and reconciliation is now imparted to those who would believe. Because when Jesus died on the cross, he took the punishment we deserved for our sin. His death, therefore, has made the way open for us to be in a right relationship with God. You see, when Jesus died, God made his peace with the world.

So, in Jesus, when he says, Peace be with you to these disciples, there is true peace. Peace be with you. Well, as Thomas is locked in the room with the disciples that Jesus has somehow managed to appear in, this bolted room, and he didn't wait for Thomas to ask, he knew exactly what was on his mind.

And so, he offered the very things that Thomas had insisted upon for him to believe. He said, Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt, but believe. How would you feel if you were Thomas? Like a total goose.

- [5 : 07] As I've pondered those words throughout the week, where Jesus says, Do not doubt, but believe.

As I've pondered those words, one thing has stood out. There doesn't seem to be a trace of condemnation whatsoever in what Jesus says here to Thomas.

There could have been. After all, Thomas was an apostle. He was one of those eyewitnesses who was there, present, during Jesus' earthly ministry. He was there when Jesus spoke and gave the Sermon on the Mount.

He was there when Jesus healed the sick. He was there when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. This Thomas was there for the most important miracle and teaching that Jesus did for three years.

and he had also heard the week before, just seven or eight days ago, from his ten faithful friends who had also spent those last three years with Jesus, that Jesus had in fact risen from the dead.

- [6 : 15] Yet this doubting Thomas had refused to believe. So, Jesus could rightly and justly have condemned him, just as a judge has the right to condemn us to the full penalty of the law if we refused to obey it.

Jesus could have refused to deal with Thomas. He could have chewed him out. He could have done whatever he wanted to. He could have been very angry with him if he wanted to. But he didn't.

Instead of discrediting Thomas, what did he do? He offered the proof that Thomas had insisted upon.

Jesus had offered him his pierced hands and sighed. Now, Thomas may have been slow to believe, but he's the first person in the New Testament, the first person in the New Testament tells us got it exactly right.

We don't know whether Thomas actually touched the scars on Jesus. I don't think he did. He had no need to. But the next words that he utters are the clearest statement in the Bible describing how the apostles and the early church viewed Jesus.

- [7 : 32] And his five words were this. He said, my Lord and my God. He didn't say just a teacher or rabbi, prophet, or even son of God, which were titles that the disciples had given to Jesus over the years.

He simply worshipped the risen Jesus as God, my Lord and my God. And that is still the example that we are to follow to this very day.

We worship the risen Jesus as Lord and God. He's not just a prophet or a good teacher who's worth listening to. He is God. And if we refuse to worship and believe in Jesus as Lord and God in this life, then he will refuse us entry into his kingdom when we die.

But what's that I hear some say? It's too difficult to believe in Jesus today, let alone believe that he is Lord and God? Well, the next verse, verse 29 of this passage is for you.

Jesus speaks here a further word to his readers. He says to Thomas, Have you believed because you have seen me? And then he says, Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.

[8 : 53] In writing these words of Jesus, John, who is the author of this gospel, clearly has an eye here for his readers, whether they be in the first century or in our post-modern individualistic world who are not eyewitnesses to Jesus.

And his words assured us, they assure us that we are not inferior to Thomas. Indeed, in Jesus' mind it is in some respects a better position.

To those of us who profess Jesus as Lord or to God today, it doesn't mean that our faith is diminished or that our joy is cut off in some way. Listen to these words that Peter wrote to persecuted Christians in the Roman Empire from 1 Peter.

I'm reading from a paraphrased version of the Bible. He says, You have never seen Jesus and you don't see him now, but still you love him and have faith in him and no words can tell how glad and happy you are to be saved.

That's why you have faith. These persecuted believers have faith because they know that from their faith in Christ comes eternal life.

[10 : 08] And friends, that is worth any pain, any sort of persecution or suffering that they may be experiencing or even we may be experiencing now because through faith in Christ we have eternal life.

Now Thomas' faith along with the other apostles is not diminished in any way because they have seen the risen Jesus. Their role in the proclamation of Jesus is invaluable.

Jesus, we later read in the Gospels, commissioned them to preach and to teach and to baptise in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

One writer says that if these apostles had not seen the risen Jesus, I've lost my place here, if they had not seen the risen Jesus, there would be no Christian faith at all.

There is no doubt that these apostles, these disciples' role is invaluable and I have to admit, I sometimes think it would have been better for us all to see the risen Jesus.

[11 : 18] There would perhaps be fewer doubters today. You see, some people think that they would believe in Jesus if they could see a definite sign or miracle.

they say they will believe if they could just have some definite sign. Well, I somehow doubt it. But Jesus says we are blessed if we can believe without seeing.

We have all the proof we need in the words of the Bible and the testimony of the believers, those believers that were there with Jesus. A physical appearance would not make him any more real to us than he is now.

Another writer says about faith, speaking about faith and belief today, for us faith today comes not by sight but from what is heard or read and what is heard comes by the word of Christ.

We have all we need written down for us in God's word. Amen. Thomas believed without any shadow of a doubt and his ministry was powerful and effective as a result.

[12 : 34] Not only did he participate in events in Jerusalem in the early years of the church's development and growth but according to reasonably reliable tradition he also took the gospel eastwards as far as India where he was to later lay down his life for Christ.

In a sense he represents the doubter who became the firm believer and John's purpose for writing this account of Jesus life is that we too may become firm believers in Jesus Christ casting aside all our doubts.

He says in the last two verses of this chapter verses 30 and 31 now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book so Jesus did lots more but these things that are written so that you may come to believe and continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah the Son of God and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Now he doesn't desire that we just accept the historical existence of Jesus as we would accept the historical existence of dinosaurs for example. If that were the case then Jesus would just be another person written down in the history books and that gets us nowhere.

John wants his readers to believe in Jesus Christ the Messiah the Son of God so that we may live forever because it is belief in his name that brings life that lasts forever.

[14 : 18] And the physical evidence of this is seen in the written account of Jesus life. There are the miracles that he performed before people changing water to wine raising people from the dead and so on.

There is the predictions of his death and resurrection told to his disciples and then there is the actual death itself. On the surface it looked purely pathetic but in actual fact it is the most significant thing that has ever ever happened in world history.

And it is shown to be so three days later when Jesus rose from the dead which is what we celebrate today here at Easter. Do you want to rise from the dead?

Do you want to rise from the dead and enter into a life where there is peace, where there is harmony, where there is no more fighting, where there is no sickness, no suffering, no drugs, no chaos?

Do you want to rise from the dead and enter into something that is as good as that? Then put your belief in Jesus, not yourself as the world would want us to. Don't put it into yourself or any other person but in Jesus alone.

[15 : 36] He is the way, the truth and the life. You may not be able to see Jesus with your physical eyes but you can turn to him and you can say as the Apostle Paul did in his second letter to Timothy.

He said this, I know whom I have believed and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. Or as another writer in the Bible says in chapter 4 of Hebrews, he who believed have entered the rest.

We who believed have entered the rest. And then the writer goes on to say, let us make every effort to enter that rest. The rest that has been talked about here is heaven where there will be peace of heart, peace of mind and peace of soul that can come from only turning our lives over to Jesus Christ who is faithful and true.

This Jesus that I'm talking about loves you enough to die for you and actively work in your life so that you may be blessed even as he says by believing even though you haven't placed your fingers in the scars of his body.

Thomas required the physical presence of Jesus to cure his doubts. You too may actually wish you could see him and hear his words.

[17 : 03] Maybe even put your hands in his wounds to cure your doubts. Well remember this, God's plan, God's plan for us is infinitely wiser than our own plans or desires.

He hasn't limited himself to one physical body. He wants to be present with you at all times. Much better, he wants to make his home with you and enter your heart to be with you forevermore.

He is or will be if you let him with you now in the form of the Holy Spirit. You can talk to him through prayer and you can hear his words as you study the scripture and you can feel his presence as you test his promises and come to worship him.

He can be as real to you as he was to Thomas. It's okay to have doubts. We all have doubts.

Thomas' sin is not in his doubting. He needs evidence just as we need evidence. But don't let your doubt turn into sin.

[18 : 20] And the sin is not believing. John's gospel is written that you may believe. If you have doubts about Jesus and his resurrection, then look to the scriptures to see what they say about Jesus and who he is.

If you have a medical problem, you consult a doctor or a specialist about the problem, don't you? You wouldn't go to just anybody for advice, would you? The same goes for Christianity.

You read about the life of Jesus in the Bible. It's used by historians and it's historically accurate as are the events of Jesus' life and his death and his resurrection.

So it goes without saying that the people you should talk to about Jesus are those whose lives mirror him. To listen to advice and accept advice from your non-Christian friends about Jesus Christ is foolishness.

It will only help to fester your doubts. If you have doubts, turn your doubts into belief by looking at Jesus' life, by reading what his eyewitnesses have said about him.

[19 : 35] There are some gospels of John and Mark out there in the church. If you haven't got a Bible, take one of those books tonight. They're free. There's some little tracks which talk about Jesus and his life.

We run evangelistic courses here on what Jesus' life is all about. Alpha and Paul mentioned earlier tonight we have a course called How Starting.

It's all about discipleship, how to grow in the Christian faith. Get into one of those groups and see what it means to grow as a Christian. Ask the right people questions. And more importantly, ask God to show himself to you.

Talk to Warwick, talk to Paul, talk to myself, talk to anyone you know who is a Christian if you have doubts and ask them to point you to Jesus. I was trying to think of something to say at the end and I found a song which is from a hymn and it's actually based on John 2.

But I'm going to read these words and they're a kind of a prayer and it helps us to think about our dates and our doubts and so on. Jesus come for we invite you guest and master, friend and Lord, now as once at Cana's wedding, speak and let us hear your word.

[20 : 55] Lead us through our need or doubting. Hope be born and joy restored. Jesus come, transform our pleasures, guide us into paths unknown.

Bring your gifts, command your servants, let us trust in you alone. Though your hand may work in secret, all shall see what you have done.

Jesus come, surprise our dullness, make us willing to receive more than we can yet imagine. All the best you have to give. Let us find your hidden riches, taste your love, believe and live.

Amen. Amen. Amen.