

## John 20:19-31

<sup>19</sup>On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews. Jesus came, stood among them, and said to them, “Peace be with you!” <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. So the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you! Just as the Father has sent me, I am also sending you.” <sup>22</sup>After saying this, he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>Whenever you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

<sup>24</sup>But Thomas, one of the Twelve, the one called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples kept telling him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

<sup>26</sup>After eight days, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them. “Peace be with you,” he said. <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe.”

<sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

<sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

<sup>30</sup>Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, did many other miraculous signs that are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

## Believing Is Seeing

### I.

Feel free to join me if you like. You’ll know what I mean in a moment.

Christian Worship 119 Were You There

1 Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

2 Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

3 Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

A solemn song that is a favorite for many during the Lenten season. Thomas’ answer to all these questions was: “Yes! I was there! I saw. I wept. I wondered what would be *my* fate and that of the other 10 non-betraying disciples. I wondered what it all meant for my hopes and dreams and those of my compatriots. I was there!”

The problem was, he was *not* there when the 10 were in the upper room and Jesus appeared behind locked doors among them. He was *not* there to hear Jesus say: “Peace be with you! Just as

the Father has sent me, I am also sending you” (John 20:21, EHV). Thomas must have thought that the others were delusional—hallucinating or something. What every one of the 11 non-betrayers wanted in all the wide world to see was Jesus—alive and well and walking around before their very eyes and speaking to them so that their very own ears could hear the words he spoke to them. It all was obviously a dream. A very, very *good* dream, to be sure, but a dream, all the same.

If there is one thing life has taught any who have lived beyond childhood, it is that a healthy dose of skepticism is a good thing. If you’re buying a house or a car or other big-ticket item, it’s a good idea to check things over very carefully. Is everything what it seems to be, or are there problems lurking beneath the surface. If you’re listening to a politician, experience has taught that candidates make lots of claims, but the follow-through is another matter entirely.

“Yeah,” Thomas thought, “I was there when he died. I saw with my own eyes the soldiers banging the nails into his hands and jabbing a spear into his side. I was there when we pried the nails out and wrapped him up and put him in the tomb. He was dead. I saw it.”

Why in the world would any normal person believe the stories told by the ten about a risen Jesus? It didn’t make any sense. Nobody rises from the dead.

“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger into the mark of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe” (John 20:25, EHV). “Trust, but verify” was a phrase used during the Cold War. What’s wrong with insisting on *seeing* something before a person accepts it? When it comes to the big questions of life, we don’t always see things clearly.

Thomas’ stubbornly insistent statement left him miserably conflicted for a week. His friends were all abuzz about the news of Jesus’ resurrection. He had seen what he had seen—Jesus’ suffering, death, and burial. That whole, long week, Thomas was holding on to death instead of the good news of life.

Those who reject the resurrection of Jesus are left with the same problem as Thomas. Only death.

Our society tries to keep death at arm’s length. A century ago people would tend to their deceased relatives themselves. They made their own burial preparations. Often the funeral was conducted from the home, rather than from a church. These days, unless you are a funeral director, you probably haven’t dealt with death in an up-close and personal way. Only shortly after a loved-one passes away, we have the funeral director come in and remove the remains. The job of the funeral home is to make the person look as life-like as possible for viewing.

Though we try hard to avoid the reality of death, we can’t. Those near and dear to us die. Death comes to everyone—the rich and powerful, the poor and unknown and eventually, to you. Death is even more unavoidable than taxes. Everybody dies.

If seeing is believing—if all our hope and confidence are based only on what we *experience*, we are pitiful, indeed. All we really see and experience ends the same way—in death.

## II.

The only way there is anything else is if there is something *outside* our experiences. That “something” is a Someone. Jesus says: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last—<sup>18</sup> the Living One. I was dead and, see, I am alive forever and ever! I also hold the keys of death and hell” (Revelation 1:17-18, EHV). For Jesus, death was *a* reality, but not *the* reality. Jesus is risen! He is risen, indeed!

It seemed to be all over on that first Good Friday. The mournful tones of “Were You There?” or some funeral dirge could easily have been running through the mind of Thomas, and the other 10, for that matter, all through that weekend. There was no hope. Not only had his hands and feet been pierced with the nails, the soldiers ran a spear into his side, just to be sure. The Eleven remaining disciples and the women who often trailed along with Jesus lovingly laid his dead body

in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. The stone rolled in front of the tomb didn't just seal the tomb, but their hearts. It was truly finished.

But it wasn't over! On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead! With that single act Jesus changed everything. Not just for himself. Not just for the 11 disciples and the women who so lovingly attended Jesus' every need during his earthly ministry. It changed everything for you—it changed your ultimate destiny. Death no longer has the last word. *Life* has the last word! The gift of life makes life worth living.

To be sure, there is something we cannot help seeing. There is weakness. There are faults. There are failures. Everyone has them. The Bible calls all of this “sin,” and declares this sin to be the cause of death. We cannot help but see that we have a problem measuring up to God's Law. We cannot help but fall into the weakness and faults and failures of sin, no matter how hard we try. To be honest, we don't really try all that hard, either. What we *see* is that we live in a world filled with sin and its consequences. We deserve the eternal death of hell that God threatens against sinners.

But Jesus won! He took on himself the burden of our sins. He resisted every temptation the devil could throw at him in our place. He suffered the punishment of hell—separation from God—on the cross. And then—he rose triumphant and victorious from the grave.

This great victory is what Jesus gives to us to announce to others. Easter evening, when the 10 were gathered, he said: “Whenever you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven. Whenever you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (John 20:23, EHV). There are no strings attached. Resurrection and eternal life are ours through faith.

### III.

“After eight days, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them. ‘Peace be with you,’ he said. <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe’” (John 20:26-27, EHV).

For those who *believe*, everything is different! Believing that Jesus is risen and that he forgives *you* just as he forgave Thomas means that there is significance and meaning to human existence. A world filled with sin and its destruction needs to hear the message of salvation and forgiveness in Jesus.

For those who believe, *believing* is seeing—at least, for now. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’ Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, did many other miraculous signs that are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:29-31, EHV). We have not seen with our physical eyes. We have seen with the eyes of faith. We have seen in faith what these eyewitnesses have recorded in God's Word.

For those who believe, we spend our lives in service to our loving and living Lord Jesus. When we die, we will go right on living with the Lord Jesus until Judgment Day. Then, with our souls are reunited with the glorified bodies that are like *his* glorified body, we will see with our own eyes, not just the eyes of faith.

*This* life will continue to be filled with challenges and disappointments. Bad things will still happen in this world, to believers and unbelievers alike. Our eyes will continue to see the reality of these things.

But where there is sin, Christ offers forgiveness. Where there is hurting, Christ offers hope. Where there is bereavement, Christ offers life. *These* things are sure and certain. Easter has shown us. God is greater than our sight. Believing is seeing. Amen.