

Seeing is Believing...Or Not

John 20:19-31

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My name is Rob Looper, and I have the privilege of serving in the Missions Department here at Briarwood. I am the National Ministries Pastor and the Church Revitalization Pastor. It's just a great office to serve in and have had the privilege of being able to minister to other churches with the Lampstand Ministry. What a blessing it is. How can you pray for me? I'll be going to New Mexico with Tim Scott in just about a week, a little bit more than a week, to do a spiritual foundation retreat at a church there. They had sent 14 of their members here for the conference in January. And this is sort of the second phase of what we do after they have gone through the initial Lampstand Conference. So we'll be leading a retreat for the whole church, introducing some of those principles and that Lampstand paradigm of **Remember, Repent and Recover** into the life of that church. And then I'll be preaching that Sunday there as well. So please pray for that.

Tonight? We are going to kind of end the Holy Week trajectory by looking at eight days after the resurrection of Jesus. We're going to be looking at this story that is well known to all of us about Thomas. But we're going to go a little bit ahead. Back to Resurrection Sunday on the evening of that day. We're going to be looking at John 20:19-29. Let me ask you to please pay careful attention because this is God's holy and inerrant word.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, that is the day that Jesus was raised from the dead, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews Jesus came and stood among them 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 Jesus said to them again, Peace be with you as the Father has sent me. Even so, I am sending 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 anyone, they are forgiven. If you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld. Now, Thomas, one of the 12 called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came so the other disciples told him, we have seen the Lord. 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. Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked. Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you. Then he said to Thomas, put your finger here and see my hands and put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve but believe. Thomas answered him, My Lord and my God. Jesus said to him, If you believe because you have seen me, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

Let's pray, Father. We ask for your Holy Spirit to illuminate your word and our hearts causing us to believe that He would give us tonight what we need -- And that is faith to continue to believe and to know that we have peace with you. You have given us a proclamation and that you are who you say you are? We pray in your name. Amen.

Well, as I look around this room, I think I'm pretty safe to say that the majority of everybody gathered here probably knows where they were on July 20th, 1969, for some of you. Immediately you think, I know what he's talking about. Some of you are thinking, well, I wasn't alive then, so how could I possibly know? But those who remember sitting in front of a television screen and seeing those grainy images of Neil Armstrong and hearing his words as he stepped on to the surface of the moon. That's one step for man, one giant leap for mankind. I remember sitting there looking at that television, just absolutely transfixed that what I was seeing was the moon and someone walking on it. Or did I? Oh you laugh. I have a relative who believed it was all a hoax, a studio production, although he actually believed it was filmed somewhere out in the desert. Many believed it's just a Hollywood studio, a NASA production to deceive the Soviet Union into thinking we had won the space race. Because that's the way these things work. Everyone knew there was no way we could go all the way from the tragedy of 1967 with Apollo one and then have someone on the moon -- just couldn't be. Now there are probably more people who believe that today than ever. Just go on YouTube and you'll see it. So many conspiracy theories. So, I guess seeing is not necessarily believing.

Well, I saw it, but I was seeing it filtered through a television screen controlled by someone who wanted me to see exactly what they wanted me to see. And so I guess I have two options. I can believe it or not.

Well, that brings us here to this account. Two accounts, really. One on the night of the resurrection. That very day, John says. And then eight days later, reckoned, as the Jews would reckon the calendar, including the day that they're speaking of. It was eight days later, exactly a week. Tonight, would have been a week after Resurrection Sunday. Bruce reminded me that Pastor Peter used to say, you don't want to miss evening service because Jesus shows up in the evening service, the first evening service in the second evening service. That's exactly what happened here. By the way, Jesus shows up in every evening service, so you don't want to miss it anyway.

On Easter last week, Sunrise service and both services. In the evening we heard again the tremendous truth, the eyewitness testimony that Jesus Christ is alive. And we have two and only two options. We may believe it or not. And so we turn to our text. John 20: 19 - 23 is the recounting of what Luke recorded in 24, 36 and 49 of his gospel. Thomas is absent. It's at first appearing in the upper room -- versus 24 through 29 recount and almost identical appearance. Except now Thomas is present. So let's look at it first. 19 on the evening of that day, the very the first day of the week.

And that's the resurrection Sunday evening. As I said, that day being the day that Jesus rose from the dead. He is very careful to note that historical fact being very precise, that this happened as a historical reality. And he says the doors were locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews and the Jews specifically refers to the Jewish authorities. And I've heard some preachers rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith here. I mean, they had Jesus who had risen from the dead. Why were they locked away in fear? Well, I think that's not only harsh, it ignores the facts of what has just happened. Jesus had been successfully arrested, tried and murdered. Their master had been killed. Now he had been raised from the dead. And there had been eyewitness testimony and many of them had seen him and they were about to see him again in just moments the Jews had declared that anyone who followed this Jesus was to be put out of the synagogue. So it's eminently reasonable. It makes perfect sense that fear had seized them of these same authorities and these same things, and they really just hadn't been able to process everything. The news of the empty tomb was still spinning in their heads. The idea that Jesus had risen really fully hadn't taken place, as we saw several times last Sunday, still not processing or as Jay said last Sunday night, Foolish unbelieving hearts slow to believe all that Jesus had said -- he really was alive. So I think we can give them a pass, and it's understandable that they would be laying low in that room with the doors locked. And then it says, Jesus came and stood among them. I think we can almost say while their heads were still spinning, Jesus stood among them. The emphasis of the locked doors is important because it highlights the divine reality of the resurrection. Jesus suddenly appeared among them, locked doors notwithstanding. Now, that raises a question, and I hear this a lot -- Could Jesus body pass through walls? And he walked through the doors. And we've talked a little bit about that. I think we could say perhaps, but the more likely reality is that John and the other gospel writers want us to see that the resurrected Jesus transcends physical limitations. He can appear in the physical dimension as he desires, whenever he desires. Again, Luke's account in 24 of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus make it very clear, strongly suggest that that Jesus did not walk through locked doors.

He suddenly appeared because of the way he disappeared. Luke, 24 He says they drew near to the village where they were going. He acted as if he were going to go further, but they urged him strongly, saying, Stay with us for it is towards evening and the day is now far spent. So he went into stay with him when he was at table with them. He took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him and he vanished from their sight. He didn't get up and walk through the walls. He didn't get up and walk through the doors. And although it's an argument from silence, I rather think that if Jesus had walked through the locked doors in John 20, John would have said something about it. He would not have failed to record it because he was so interested in recording the facts. So most importantly, the texts suggest that Jesus appearances and disappearance were instantaneous. He stood among them. It's a fascinating one. Liberal commentator said that Jesus, he was a disbelieving commentator, said that Jesus had obviously snuck into the room unawares. He was hiding in a corner, waiting for the right moment to come out and to deceive them. No, Jesus

transcending all physical realities because of who he is and his resurrected body stood among them. So if we know anything about John's gospel, it's that he's not ultimately concerned primarily with factual reality of the events he relates, but of their critical spiritual importance. Yes, he's concerned about the truth and the facts because, as he says later, these things are written down so that you may believe. But he intends for us to marvel not just that Jesus once dead, is alive, but he wants us to have no doubt whatsoever that because Jesus Christ is alive, we who love him have peace with God.

Three times in this passage, we hear this important pronouncement from Jesus. Look first at verse 19 on the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you. How many times, thousands of times had they heard that traditional greeting the Jews -- Shalom Aleichem -- Peace be with you. And there he was, with God's blessing of peace upon brothers. And immediately after he pronounces peace upon the disciples, he shows them his wounds. This is what he had said. This verse 20. He showed them his hands and his side. And the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. And then he says again, Peace be with you. The very presence of Jesus in that room among them was proof that he was alive. But the presence of his wounds removed any possibility of reasonable doubt. It was really him.

Now, another question.

If this is Jesus resurrected body, why does it still retain the wounds? I Corinthians 15 seems to strongly indicate that in the general resurrection of the dead, the earthly qualities of our bodies will be removed in the transformation into spiritual bodies in the eternal state. So why then does Jesus body retain the wounds? Well, there are two possibilities. One is that the wounds are temporary, meant to be a present proof to the disciples during the time between his resurrection as ascension. In other words, it's a condescension to us to convince the apostles it was really him. Once he ascended, they would disappear. Another option -- Jesus' case is unique and the wounds are permanent. Yes. Our bodies will be transformed with none of the infirmities or scars from this fallen world when we are in the eternal state. But Jesus' body is the exception. They serve as reminders for eternity of the source of salvation. I favor this view because of the fact that Jesus is presented in the Book of Revelation as the LAMB who's been slain from before the foundation of the world. Yes, it's a symbol, but it shows us how critically important it is for us to understand that Jesus was slain for us. He rose from the dead. He is the lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world. Whatever the case, we can say with certainty that the wounds are a reminder that the resurrected Jesus is the crucified Jesus one and the same, and He bookends his showing them his wounds with this proclamation of peace, clearly intending to show that the wounds themselves bear witness to his having made their peace with God. And they would hear that pronouncement over and over again, almost to the point that it was just something that was normal to them. But now when he says to them, Peace be with you. Shalom Aleichem, and then shows his wounds. It has explosive new meaning. Peace bought for you.

Now, the third pronouncement of peace comes exactly a week later with Thomas, verse 24.

Now, Thomas, one of the 12 called The Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, We have seen the Lord. But he said to them, Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and placed my finger into the mark of the nails and placed my hand in the side I will never believe.

See how insistent he is here unless I see the mark of the nails and placed my finger into the mark of the nails and place my hand into his side. You can almost hear the emphasis in him and then he says, I will never or believe. To me, this is one of the most amazing proofs that the disciples really understood that Jesus was dead when he died on the cross. All these theories that said, Well, they didn't really believe you is that that's why they could believe that he was raises because they didn't think he'd really died in the first place. They were just part of the ruse. No, they knew he was dead. Thomas knew he was dead. And he said, I am not that easily convinced.

Now, what do we know about Thomas? Well, we know that Thomas was a twin. His name both in Aramaic. And then, as it says Didymus, the Greek means twin. We don't know anything about his twin. We've seen him in chapter 11, verse 16, where he was urging his fellow disciples to return with Jesus after Lazarus had died. To Bethany. And there he says, Let's go. Let's die with him. Because there they had sought to kill Jesus and he was convinced that they would go. But you see his faith. He was he was dedicated to go and even die with the Lord.

We see him in chapter 14, verse five in the upper room, asking Jesus a totally practical question. We don't know where you're going. How can we know the way? So, we can say Thomas is a rational, dedicated, loyal disciple, maybe a little bit overly a realists, perhaps a little bit of an Eeyore. Fool me once. I'm not going to be fooled again.

We don't know why he was not with him at the time of the first appearance, but Thomas response having seen Jesus and their upper room, is well known as we've seen. I will never believe unless these demands, these things that are necessary for me, I am able to be satisfied with some celebrate. Thomas is a realist. Well, good for him. He needs empirical evidence, and so do I. Others admonishing his weak faith, not willing to accept the other's testimony. These are men he spent his life with and been in incredible situations with. Can you not trust their testimony? Not to mention, as Jay referred last week the Scriptures themselves spoke that Jesus was to rise from the dead. The conclusion I think we come to is that in the end, Thomas' refusal to believe the testimony of the ten is not a combination of his personality, his disappointment, or just a misunderstanding of the Scriptures. Ultimately, it's a simple fact of unbelief, as we'll see in a moment. That's what Jesus rebukes him for. Verse 26, *eight days later, his disciples were inside again. Thomas was with them, although the doors were locked. Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you.* Still, a week later, doors locked. Not quite sure what all the implications were. This shouldn't make us judge them. Either way, again, it's almost identical. Jesus suddenly appears to them again, just standing with them. And he makes that pronouncement again. And it seems to be directed directly to Thomas because immediately he addresses him. Verse 27, *Put your finger here and see my hands. Put out your hand and place it*

in my side --place your fist in my side as Dr. Doriani drew our attention to -- put your fist in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe can literally be translated --Stop unbelieving and start believing.

Now did Jesus have to do this. I mean, it's a rebuke, but it's a most gracious rebuke showing his condescending love and his patience and it shows also Jesus omnipresence and omniscience. He knew what was in Thomas's heart. He had heard the proclamation that he said he would not believe unless these demands were satisfied. Do not disbelieve but believe. It's not the word for doubt. So Doubting Thomas is incorrect, it's unbelieving, **apaistia**. Strictly speaking, he was at that moment an atheist. There is no resurrection. Jesus is dead. I do not believe. I will never believe until Jesus directs him to look, to touch, to feel. Verse 28 Thomas answered him, My Lord and my God. Jesus said to him, have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe. Now, his response, of course, is engendered lots of discussion. There are those who are basically saying he was astonished. This was essentially O-M-G. No, it was not O-M-G -- one that would have been blasphemous on a faithful Jew's lips to take the Lord's name in vain. He was not doing that at all. He was making a pronouncement of belief. For him, seeing was believing. I don't think he actually reached out and touched anything he immediately saw and he believed in his doubt. His unbelief was satisfied, immediately was brought to repentance and faith. And I think at that moment, step for the very first time into the wide world of understanding the peace of Christ that was proclaimed to him and witnessed by the wounds, the peace that's objective on the one hand, in which God has satisfied his wrath in the death of Christ and now we are at peace with God because of our Union, with Him. It's an objective reality. No matter what we may feel, if we're united to Christ in his death and his resurrection, we're at peace with God. It's as if this is the exclamation point. The second exclamation point on it is finished. Peace upon you -- that is where we stand if we are in Christ -- at peace.

And of course, out of that objective reality of peace comes that subject of reality, of peace that Jesus speaks of so often in the Gospel of John. Let not your hearts be troubled. My peace I give to you. John 14:27 Not as the world gives - I give to you. It's that peace which flows out of the objective reality that we realize that God is no longer at war with us. And so we don't have to be at war with him. We can lay down our arms and those wounds are the witness, I believe the eternal witness for that peace has been one. Take you hymnal from the pew in front of you and turn to Hymn #199-- Arise My Soul Arise

He ever lives above for me to intercede.
His all redeeming love, His precious blood to plead.
His blood atoned for every race,
His blood atoned for every race.
And sprinkles now the Throne of Grace.

O my soul, arise! Behold the risen Christ,
Your great High Priest, your spotless sacrifice!

O my soul, arise! God owns you as His child!
Shake off your guilty fears, my soul, arise!

Five bleeding wounds He bears, received on Calvary.
They pour effectual prayers, they strongly plead for me.
“Forgive him, O forgive,” they cry.
“Forgive him, O forgive,” they cry.
“Don’t let that ransomed sinner die.”

My God is reconciled, His pard’ning voice I hear.
He owns me as His child; I can no longer fear.
With confidence I now draw nigh.
With confidence I now draw nigh,
and “Father, Abba, Father” cry.

Indeed it has been won. It has been fought. Jesus does not proclaim our peace with Him, however, merely for us to know everything is going to be okay as we wait to join him in eternity one day. In other words, is like, Hey, it's fine, it's cool. Everything is going, it is good and I'm coming back one day. So you just sit tight. No, Jesus continues in verse 21 with the proclamation of our mission. Now that we have in fact received God's peace in Christ. Now he's saying it to the remainder of the ten who are gathered there and then also later with Thomas there, the 11. And having been commissioned with this, they carry out their mission, which equips us through the ages with the same mission. Jesus said to them, again, *peace be with you as the Father has sent me. Even so, I am sending you. When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.* Jesus immediately connects our peace with God, with the mission and message that God has given them to us because Jesus Christ is alive. We who love Him have a proclamation to the world.

Now, again, when he says that, it says in verse 22 that he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit immediately you might think about whether or not this is a contradiction with Acts 2 and the giving of the Holy Spirit. Well, I think the answer to that is no. I'll say this is very briefly and deserves a greater study, but first, it doesn't make sense that John would be combining two events some 50 days apart after having taken pains to specifically say that they were here on these specific days, the evening of that day, the first day of the week, because some have said that what he's doing is just conflating the two. He just wants to bring them together and emphasize the point that the Holy Spirit is given to them. Now, he's very much aware of Luke and acts. He's not contradicting it. He's not joining them. He's supplementing it with additional information, as is often the case, particularly in John's gospel. The significance of what Jesus says and does often comes clear to the disciples later, He says, You do not yet know, but you will. And this is no exception. Here Jesus breathes the spirit upon them in the upper room as John says at his ascension, he will tell them that they are to be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now, and acts to records that event Pentecost and shows the Spirit's

role in propelling the Apostles forward in their gospel work. So Pentecost was not when the Apostles received the Spirit for the first time, but they were visibly and unmistakably anointed by him for their apostolic mission. Just as prophets and priests and kings were visibly anointed by the spirit in the old covenant for their work. You could even argue in one sense they'd always had the Holy Spirit because they belonged to him. If they'd been born again, they were born by the Spirit. But ultimately, in breathing the spirit upon them, Jesus is fulfilling what He promised them that previous Thursday. John 14. If you've just turned over to John 14 :25ff

These things, I have spoken to you while I am still with you, but the Helper the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace. I leave with you. My peace I give to you not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled neither let them be afraid.

Again, his peace is front and center here, directly connected to the Spirit's ministry of Comfort and Empowerment. And so Jesus has given them the Spirit so that they might have the power to make the proclamation that they've been given to the world, he says in verse 22, *as the father has sent me, even so, I am sending you* -- far from having finished his work now he is continuing to do his work, and that's exactly what Luke says at the beginning of Acts. In describing that book, he says *all that Jesus began to do and teach in my gospel. I am now going to tell you what he continues to do and teach through his church, through his apostles, and ultimately, as he builds his church through his faithful followers.* So what is the message of that mission? Verse 30 *Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.*

That's the point They were empowered so that they might proclaim that Jesus is who He says He is, that He is the fulfillment of the prophecies, and that in Him believing in him, we may have life, the sharing of the good news of the Gospel, those who believe have life specifically the forgiveness of sins. Verse 23 *If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven. If you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.* Now. Sticky situation. What's he says? He's saying that we have the power to release people from their sins. Was he saying the apostles had the keys in the sense that they could decide who would be forgiven and who wouldn't be? No, not at all. What he's saying is that they have a message which proclaims with authority, what is the basis for the forgiveness of sins and the basis for judgment?

Jesus himself said it. John 316 *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.* But John 318, says *anyone who does not believe is condemned already.* It's a clear statement and we, when we proclaim the Gospel or not ourselves personally, retaining or losing – we are proclaiming the basis by which God says you may be forgiven, but Jesus himself says, *I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father, if not through me.* And in that case, we may say to anyone with tears and a heavy heart that if they will not believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, their

sins are not forgiven. John goes on, and first John, to say that such a person is essentially the Antichrist, to deny that Christ has come in the flesh for the work of salvation.

So this is essentially bearing witness to the truth of the gospel, and that's the witness, and that's the mission that we have to be able to make that proclamation to the world. This is how God saves sinners through Christ, through the proclamation of what he did to make peace with sinners. And you may believe and enter into that life also.

I love Luke, 24. Let's go back and look at that. The passage there at the end is he again had given them that two hour Bible study that Jay mentioned last week versus 44 through 49. And he says, *These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets in the Psalms must be fulfilled, that he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.*

And he said to them, Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer, and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations. That's what he's referring to. That is the great message that we have, beginning from Jerusalem and then, of course, Judea, Samaria, the uttermost parts of the earth. And then he says, you are witnesses of these things and so are we, because the most important thing for us to understand is that even though we were not eyewitnesses, we are heart witnesses that Jesus is alive. Look at these final words. The Jesus says to Thomas, here, verse 29, Jesus said to him, *Have you believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have yet believed.*

No, I don't think Jesus is trying to make a comparison between seeing with one's eyes and seeing, if you will, with one's heart. He's not saying, Well, Thomas, it took me showing you and you finally believed. Blessed are those who don't need what you asked for, almost as if Jesus was digging at him. That's not what he's saying at all, Thomas' unbelief required evidence, but Jesus was gracious to him. But. But if that's what he was saying, then what do we say to those 500 that Jesus appeared to and first Christians 15 ? Is something wrong with them? Does it mean that eyewitness testimony was less spiritual, less important? No. So much is built on what we celebrated last week. What he is saying is that the testimony, the gospel itself, is evidence. It is inspired, wholly and inerrant testimony, the fulfillment of what Jesus and what God said he would do in Jesus from the very beginning, Moses and the prophets, I Corinthians 15, Paul says, *I delivered them to you as that which was of first importance, that Jesus died for our sins (what?) according to the Scriptures, that He was buried and he rose on the third day (what?) according to the Scriptures.*

This is evidence. This is the evidence that we now give, not because we point merely to the eyewitness testimony, but because of all of the testimony of God's faithfulness in his promises and of describing the human need and God's solution to that human need. The heart witness of Christians today is believing.

Now, think about it. Apart from those 500 plus witnesses, the 11 apostles, and we assume a fair number of those 120 that were gathered up in that upper room that Luke mentions in Acts - less than 40 days. From this moment that we're looking at tonight, no one would ever see the physical body of the resurrected Jesus again. And no one will until the end of history and his return. So that puts the vast, vast, vast majority of Christians out of that category of eyewitness. In other words, it is by the authority of the proclamation of the Gospel that people will believe that Jesus is alive and by believing receive that blessedness of life in him. In other words, hearing is believing. Faith comes by hearing, Paul says, and hearing by the Word of Christ. So yes, we bear witness to the eyewitness testimony, but we too are witnesses of these things if we have believed in Christ and entered into this new life knowing the forgiveness of sins, realizing who we are as we are being transformed by the power of the gospel, because the gospel is the power of God for salvation, all of us who believe in Jesus, everyone who believed in Christ from that point of his ascension on are blessed not as eyewitnesses but as heart witnesses. And that is the message that we carry. Jesus is alive and we may know him and have life now in His name.

Now, in light of that, how could we ever doubt that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation? That God truly takes people from unbelief to belief by the proclamation that Jesus died for our sins, by our own experience, as those times when we find ourselves most profoundly convinced and we see the power of God in our lives, how could we ever doubt? Why would we ever be afraid? Why would we ever struggle with sharing the content of the Gospel? Something so powerful? And that's a good question. I don't have an answer to it because we do. That was brought home to me probably about 30 years ago in particular when I was in Saint Louis serving in a church there, same church with John Haines. He hasn't changed a bit, by the way, is only more passionate. And we had gathered that evening for a service of all the church, the churches in Saint Louis, a special joint presbytery service. And we had Sinclair Ferguson coming to speak for us. I was particularly excited because I'd been working with a young man named Mac that I had met who was a Jehovah's Witness, but he was not a good Jehovah's Witness because he struggled and didn't do what he was supposed to do, and he began to have questions about the gospel. And I had met him through another person. And we began to talk and I would share with him. And I tried to convince him with the historical things that convinced me as an unbeliever. And he would look at those things and say, you know, it all makes sense. But I just don't know. I just I just don't know. I'm just not there. And so I thought he should come to the service and hear Sinclair Ferguson, I mean, Sinclair Ferguson, just his accent alone gets people saved, right? Sort of like with Derek Thomas this morning. And so he said he would meet me there and I didn't find him as a large church. We were meeting and I couldn't find him. We didn't have cell phones in those days, so I couldn't just text him and say, Hey, Mac, where are you? So I settled in, and Sinclair Ferguson began to preach the worst sermon I've ever heard him preach in my life. Now I know it's a hard thing to say. It was a dry treatise on 2Corinthians 5:21, and I mean dry. I listen to it and knew it was all factual information but it lacked what we called in our preaching classes in those days – lived body detail – it lacked any kind of personal

connection. He just seemed like he was maybe even asleep. The only thing going for him was his accent. And I was so disappointed. And then I felt guilty for thinking that way. And I thought, Well, I'm glad Mac's not here.

The next day, Monday morning, I got a phone call at the church and it was Mac. He said, Hey, Rob, I was there last night. That's the most amazing thing I've ever heard in my life. I mean, to think that there's a transaction that took place on the cross my sin on Jesus and his righteousness to me, it's amazing. And I'm thinking, I've been telling you that for like three months. Hearing is believing and that is under the control of the Holy Spirit. But hearing is how we come to understand by the work of the Holy Spirit, that those gospel truths are worked into our hearts. Our eyes are opened, and we see Jesus, who has won for us peace, who's united us to himself, who has indeed taken our sin upon himself on that cross and given us His righteousness and raised us to sit with him at the right hand of his father. That's the power of the gospel. That's the power of the message that we have.

And all we need to do is bear witness to what we know is true. Jesus is alive. He is who he says He is, and these things are written down so that you may believe you are seeing is believing, hearing is believing. These things are true.

Let's pray. Lord God, Thank you. Thank you for the way you condescend to us. We don't deserve in any way for you to bend to the demands that we make. You had no obligation to give to Thomas what he asked and if in fact he was unbelieving he may not have even really believed that there would have been a response. But you were gracious. You opened his heart so that he fell before you and repentance and faith. And you have written these things down and given us your wholly inerrant word, the evidence of the testimony of your word - the Gospel, so that we might proclaim these things because we are witnesses in our hearts that you, Lord Jesus, are alive. Will you empower us then, without fear, to never doubt the power of the Gospel, but to proclaim it and to see you gather you're waiting elect We pray in your name. Amen.