

Believing Is Seeing

John 20:24-31

Do you know what is meant by the scientific method? It is the process by which you form an hypothesis, or theory, and then through careful and regulated experiments and observations, you test those hypotheses in order to prove or disprove them. In this process, rightly carried out, nothing is validated as truth unless it is demonstrated to be so by the evidence accumulated in a science laboratory.

There should be no presuppositions in the scientific method, no starting point upon which to base your conclusions. You simply examine the facts in order to determine your conclusion. That's the scientific method.

But there is a problem with that. The problem is called sin. And because of sin, because of the knowledge of good AND evil is inherent in the nature of every man descended from Adam and Eve, man is not innocent. All human beings have built-in presuppositions, and the natural man, the man living without the Spirit and without Christ, has a basic disposition that causes him to suppress the truth. The truth of God. I know that because the Bible says so.

Rom. 1:18 "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

So much for objective science! Let me give you a case study. The issue of creation. Ask an atheist who believes in evolution this question, "Do you believe in God?" They will say, "No, for I cannot prove the existence of God in my laboratory."

Then ask that atheist, "Where is your evidence? Can you prove in your laboratory that God doesn't exist?" And when he says, "No," then ask, "How do you know he doesn't exist."

Or you could ask, "Were you there?" That's a great question, isn't it? It is the question God asks Job as a rebuke to his foolishness,

Job 38:4 "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. 5 Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? 6 To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, 7 When the morning stars sang together, And all the sons of God shouted for joy?"

How does an atheist know that God doesn't exist? Ultimately, it is not a result of the scientific method, but the place where they determine to start. It is there presupposition. It is, therefore, a matter of faith! A matter of religion, if you will. It is the religion of secular humanism, which is so thoroughly immersed in our public education and government systems. The starting point of that religion is simple. The main doctrine of that religion is plain. God does not exist. And therefore mankind is the highest object of study, and only what we as human beings demonstrate to be is true is true. There is a simple way to say that.

I. SEEING IS BELIEVING.

If I see it, if I observe it with my own eyes, then I will believe it. Before they will believe,

A. Some people demand scientific evidence.

Thomas was just such a man. A disciple of Christ. But he was inexplicably missing from the first appearance of Jesus to the group of disciples late that Sunday evening after the resurrection. And he would not believe.

v.24-25

Quite simply, that is unbelief. Sinful unbelief. From a man who had spent three years as a disciple of Jesus. And in our text today, we read that in the evening of that first resurrection Sunday, Jesus came to show himself to his disciples.

v.19-20

But Thomas wasn't there. Perhaps he thought he was being noble. Perhaps he thought he was being prudent. Perhaps he was trying to demonstrate his intellectual superiority. He wouldn't be so gullible as to believe just anything. He had to see it first!

Thomas certainly represents the spirit of our age, our unbelieving age. An age so captivated the arrogance of our own wisdom. Demanding evidence, when they suppress the truth of the evidence already provided.

So let me say it clearly. The reason why people deny the existence of God and refuse to serve and worship him is not because of insufficient evidence. The reason is moral. The reason is sin. They suppress the truth in their wickedness.

Therefore there is a certain futility in trying to convince someone to believe in Jesus by presenting the evidence! There is a definite futility in trying to prove to an unbeliever the truth of God's revelation in Scripture by supplying evidence. Because they cannot believe!

In their moral separation from God, in their state of being

declared dead in sin, they cannot understand the things of God. Isn't that what Paul says in,

1 Cor. 2:14 "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Let this be very practical. When you are talking to an unbeliever, maybe even one whom you love or know quite well, perhaps a friend or even a family member, don't expect to win them to Christ by proving a set of facts to them. And don't think that their refusal to come to believe in Christ is due to your own inability to explain it well enough or prove it adequately enough. And don't let me ever fall into that trap either. For the message I preach, the message of the gospel is foolishness to those who demand, as a matter of first priority, to see the evidence.

1 Cor. 1:18 "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." 20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness."

Those words are a rebuke to those who demand scientific evidence as the basis and foundation of their faith. For those who demand such evidence are,

B. Those who demand to be their own authority.

Notice what Thomas says. Notice the repetition of the first

person pronoun, which I will emphasize to make my point,
v.25

“I retain the right to be my own authority.” That’s the essence of rebellion and sin, isn’t it? When the first man and the first woman were tempted by Satan to disobey the very clear and direct command of God, they said, “It looks good for food to me.” “It looks pleasant to my eyes.” “It looks desirable to make to me wise.” “I will eat it.”

That’s sin. I will choose for myself.

Too often, we recoil against the exercise of authority, don’t we? We rebel. “Nobody is going to tell me what to do.” That’s called autonomy, self-rule or self-law. We are proud, independent, self-sufficient. And Scripture teaches us that autonomy must be put to death, and replaced by God’s rule, God’s law. Technically, the right word would be “theonomy,” meaning “God’s law,” though that usually has a very specific and focused meaning today that I wouldn’t agree with. But in essence, we all must be those willing to be ruled and governed by God, by God’s law, and not by our own self-law.

This is a crucial point, and one that has broad implications. The one overarching lesson that young children must learn, early in childhood, is that they are not autonomous. They live under authority. And as a matter of absolute necessity, they must learn to submit to the authority which God has given to their parents. Submission is the first and primary lesson of childhood, and if that lesson is neglected, the child grows into adulthood in horrible peril of danger.

And the great danger is that too many adults are living today who fail to genuinely, graciously, and sincerely submit to authority

over them, most especially the authority of God. They are self-willed. And self-ruled. Everyone does what is right in his own eyes.

My friends, autonomy is not God’s way. “Seeing is believing” is not God’s way. The scientific method is not God’s way of discipleship. For we must put to death that horrible, sinful, deadly instinct to retain authority over our own lives. We must repent of that horrible demand to be our own authority.

And yet, having said all that, and having seen the bad example of Thomas, notice what Jesus does. He agrees to,

II. BEING SEEN.

There is such grace in this, because,

A. Jesus condescends to the weakness of man.

Jesus doesn’t simply appear to condemn Thomas for his sinful unbelief. Instead, point by point, he accedes to Thomas’ demands. Thomas had said he needed to see the wounds in Jesus’ hand. He needed to put his own finger into the print of the nails and into the wound in his side. Otherwise, “I will not believe.”

Look at,
v.27a

Notice what Jesus again said to his disciples, Thomas now included, when he appeared again that time.

v.26

After eight days would mean the following Sunday, one week later, for remember the Jews referred to time by including the first and the last day. So just as the resurrection on the third day was actually only two days later, the way we speak, so the eighth day

would be one week later. Jesus appears, miraculously, in bodily form, as he had before. And as he did before, he speaks a word of peace. "Peace to you!"

This to a man who has publicly declared his own unbelief.

Why is that? What is it that moved Jesus to condescend to such sinful weakness? What is it that caused Jesus to respond with favor instead of condemnation?

Let me answer that question with a very broad and generalized statement of salvation. Why does Jesus condescend to save any sinner?

Tit. 3:3 "For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

He saved us according to his mercy. He comes to man in kindness and love.

Eph. 2:8 "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast."

It is all of grace. This encounter between Jesus and Thomas is a triumph of grace, because despite the emphasized sinful rebellion of Peter, Jesus speaks to him to satisfy his questions.

And John adds a comment that makes this all very broad and generalized, and applicable therefore for all of us.

v.30

There were many other miracles! A similar comment is found at the very end of this book.

John 21:25 "And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen."

The obvious point is that miracles are provided, and that was the primary function of the apostles. That was the foundation for the church which they laid. This is why that inspired prophecy and miraculous gifts continued for a generation after Jesus. To give attesting evidence. To validate the truth of what he said.

Heb. 2:3 "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, 4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?"

Therefore, in great condescension to the weakness of man, God saw to it that the gospel proclaimed by Jesus Christ would be confirmed by those who heard him, confirmed by historical evidence. Eyewitness testimony. God would bear witness to the truth and truthfulness of Jesus Christ by giving supernatural, miraculous power and authority to the apostles. The evidence is there.

But don't miss what Jesus says to Thomas at the end of this encounter in John 20.

v.27b "Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

That is both a rebuke and an exhortation. Jesus isn't letting Thomas off the hook, so to speak. Rather, we could call this a triumph of grace.

Indeed, each one of you who believes in Jesus Christ, is a trophy of grace. I have always appreciated that way to identify and describe Christians. I am a trophy of grace. What I mean is that, that I stand before you this afternoon in demonstration of the triumphant and successful work of grace.

Just as the Apostle Paul said of himself,

1 Tim: 1:15 “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. 16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.”

So Jesus condescends to the weakness of man, but,

B. Jesus also commands the unbelieving to believe.

And because of the work of God’s grace, Thomas does.

v.28

There is a warning in this, to all who would demand proof or evidence from God. There is a warning in this for any who wish to retain authority over their own life, who wish to remain as the lord of their own life. Jesus says, “Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”

And if you think you can use Thomas as a good example to imitate, then recognize the depth of repentance which he was required to experience. He was required to recognize the Lordship of Jesus Christ. And his testimony becomes a well known and representative statement of genuine, saving faith. “My Lord and my God.”

No separation between those two things, Lord and God.

Thomas recognized the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He recognized the authority of Jesus Christ, in the humility of his own words. His autonomy was gone, for you cannot be autonomous and then address someone else as your Lord.

Thomas was severely rebuked, and God used that rebuke for his own sanctification.

So what about the scientific method? Will evidence alone be enough? What about those who suppress the obvious explanation of that evidence, and still demand the right to be their own authority? What do you say to someone who says, “I don’t believe in God, because I can’t see him.” I don’t believe in God because he is just a creation of your own imagination.

What do you say to people who don’t believe what the Bible says, or who demand to examine for themselves whether or not the Bible is true? What do you say to someone who says, “Seeing is believing?”

You might simply want to say this.

III. BELIEVING IS SEEING.

Look at,

v.29

There is the point of this whole event. That is what Jesus had in mind to say all along. His purpose is to define the blessing of faith. And the blessing is simple. Blessed are those who believed. Without seeing.

That’s what faith is, isn’t it? That’s the very definition of faith.

Heb. 11: 1 “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a

good testimony. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”

Faith is saying, “I believe it because God said it. And if God said it, it is true!” With or without evidence.

So I admit to you that I have presuppositions, too. When I look at scientific evidence, I am not neutral. When study the doctrine of the creation of the world, I am not a blank slate. I am created in God’s image, and because I do not suppress that truth which comes with being a creature in the image of God, I recognize certain things, and believe them to be true, namely God’s “invisible attributes..., even His eternal power and Godhead.”

Then, with presupposition, I go to look at the evidence, and guess what? The evidence is consistent with that truth! With a regenerated heart, with a renewed will and mind, I can now see and rightly understand the evidence. The evidence validates the truth that I have believed.

So it is, I don’t see in order that I might believe. Instead, I believe. And in believing, God has given me eyes to see.

How edifying it is, with the eyes of faith, the regenerated, born again eyes of faith, to look at the evidence, to “behold the wondrous works of God.” And those were the words used by the wise Elihu in calling Job back to faith after his trials with his oppressive friends,

Job 37:14 “Listen to this, O Job; Stand still and consider the wondrous works of God. 15 Do you know when God dispatches them, And causes the light of His cloud to shine? 16 Do you know how the clouds are balanced, Those wondrous works of Him who

is perfect in knowledge?”

My friends, believing is seeing. And you are brought to faith, you are brought to the place of believing, not by the evidence you see. For without Christ, you cannot rightly see it. Rather, you are brought to faith HOW?

You are brought to salvation HOW? By the evidence? No. By the word.

Rom. 10:13 For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

Paul continues in,

Rom.10:14 “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!” 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” 17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Faith comes by hearing the word of God. The word that is written. Therefore, John writes in,
v.31

A. The Scriptures are written for us to believe.

If your approach to the Scripture is to try and figure out which parts are true and which parts are false, then you have missed the whole point. If you come to Scripture to test whether or not it is true, you have missed the whole point.

Just as Thomas missed the whole point when he said, “Unless

I see in his hands the print of the nails...I will not believe.”

The point is that the Scriptures are given to you in order to be believed. In order for you to believe in Jesus, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

And, so clearly, so appropriately, John says,
v.31b “...and that believing you may have life in His name.”

B. Believing the Scriptures is the path of life.

Not seeing the evidence for yourself. Not testing God to see if he is true. And not experimenting to see if God will meet your needs and satisfy your desires.

No. The path of life is in believing the word of God. Believing in the great subject and focus of that word, which is Jesus Christ.

Thus it is not my job to proclaim to you my own words. It isn't my responsibility to entertain you for a few moments on Sunday morning. My job is to preach the gospel of peace. For “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Speaking about Christ, Peter writes in,

1 Peter 1:8 “...whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”

Does that describe you? Do you love Jesus? Do you love his word? Do you believe his word? Do you obey his word, which is his own manner of defining love?

Though you have never seen him with your eyes, you are to believe him. By faith, to see him. And, in the glory of the age to come, to see him with your own eyes.

But now, throughout this age, we live by faith, not by sight. With Abraham, the man of faith, we are “called to go out...knowing where [we are] going. By faith ...[we wait] for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

Let me end with a warning about falling into the temptation of Thomas, or in other words, a call to believe. Whatever the circumstances of your life, declare yourself what Thomas was brought to confess, “My Lord and my God.”

You can't see his hands this morning, not with the sight of your eyes. You can't see his resurrected body, not here and now.

But you can believe. You can believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God. Dear friends, by believing, you may have life in his name.