

## Title: “Blessed without Seeing”

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John 20:29

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**Service Readings:** Acts 5:29–42; 1 Peter 1:3–9; John 20:19–31

*Faith rests on the Word of the risen Christ.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Life was good for Thomas. He had spent the past few years in the shadow of his Lord. And during this time, life was.... Good. All his needs had been provided: food, clothing, shelter. His days were spent hearing Jesus teach and watching Jesus heal. It was not a life of luxury, but it was a life that he wouldn't trade for any amount of money.

Life was good for Thomas, until it wasn't. The past week was a nightmare. He saw someone he called Lord arrested, beaten to within an inch of his life, crucified, and buried. And now *he* was hiding from, potentially, the very same fate. He had left his Jewish church to follow Jesus; Jesus, who confessed that he was the Son of God. Yet this Son of God seemed to be dead. And *now* those who also followed Jesus seemed to believe that they had seen him risen! The grave, they continued to insist, was empty. This was too much for Thomas. The very foundation of his faith was crumbling and he wasn't sure where it would leave him.

There is a story about a small Norwegian vessel that sat in an English port for a few days. One of those days happened to be Good Friday, and the chief officer said to the captain, “Shall I hoist the flag at half-mast today?” The captain having no context for the question asked the officer why he would do that. “Well,” said the officer, “they say Jesus died on this day.”

Where would Thomas hoist the flag? What would he be thinking as he did? His faith, so solid when he walked with Jesus, when life seemed good. But now? What once seemed logical, certain, concrete now seemed illogical, uncertain, and crumbling. God cannot die, can he? And he most certainly would not allow it at the very hands of those he created, would he? So, who really *was* this Jesus that he had followed? I wonder if the deepest, darkest question in his mind, the question he antagonized over, was this: had he, Thomas, been revealed to be gullible? Had he been led to base everything he believed... on a lie?

And now.... And *now* his fellow brothers and sisters were insisting that this Jesus they followed, this Jesus who claimed to be the Son of God was alive! Not in spirit but in physical body! “Fool me once”, he probably thought. He couldn't accept these claims, not on just the words of these people. For if he had been fooled, how much more had they, for now they were uttering things that were... impossible? Jesus was dead. The previous years were a lie. He had been abandoned; *they* had been abandoned; Why couldn't these people *accept* this reality? John records it this way:

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> 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.”

The ESV translation doesn't do justice to Thomas' level of disbelief. This was not simply some weird scientific request. He wasn't stating that he wanted to study this Jesus to determine if the body was physical and exhibited marks consistent with deadly crucifixion. No, this was exasperation. This was akin to him completing rejecting their claims, telling them to stop even *thinking* those thoughts. "Stop talking this way," he was insisting! "There is no way this is possible! Just stop! It would take a *miracle* for me to believe what you are telling me! I'd have to thrust my fingers in his hands and shove my hand in his side, and you and I both know that's impossible! So stop with this craziness!" This more accurately reflects his state of mind as recorded in this passage. The ship's flag most surely would be set at half-mast! No question about that!

But notice what happens next:

<sup>26</sup> 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." <sup>27</sup> 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."

In that moment he came face to face with the reality that his reason would only take him so far when it came to the things of God. In that moment he discovered that reason alone could only *partially* raise the flag up the pole. His mind alone could not process the reality that was speaking to him in that room. And yet, see what happens next.

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

Have you ever paused to consider the miracle encapsulated in this response? A Thomas who relied on his intellect alone would have followed through with Jesus' request. He would have examined this living body that stood before him. Or, at the very least, he would have questioned how a risen Jesus could even be possible. But Thomas does none of that! Instead he moves directly to confessing Jesus as God! He immediately raises the flag to its highest point. Reason alone doesn't account for that. So what happened between verse 27 and 28?

The eyes of Thomas were opened. Not by his own work, not by his own intellect, but by the spirit of God. It is *he* who opens the eyes of the blind so that they can see Jesus and proclaim him as lord. Over and again in John's Gospel this is the message proclaimed. Nicodemus comes as a learned teacher, yet doesn't *see* who Jesus is. The Pharisees "judge according to the flesh," and refuse to open their eyes. A physically blind man gradually comes to a full confession of faith - his physical and spiritual eyes opened. You see, John's Gospel concludes with this very thought: "These are written so that you may believe..." Open your eyes! But here's the thing. You can't on your own. Just like Thomas, the most you can do is raise the flag half way up the pole. It takes the actions of God to raise it to the top.

Had Thomas been revealed to be gullible? No, he had been revealed to be blind. Three years he followed Jesus. Three years he was blind. But Jesus didn't give up on him. Instead, he came to him and gave him sight. By faith Thomas the eyes of Thomas were open.  
By faith Thomas came to believe that Jesus was incarnate.  
By faith Thomas came to know that Jesus was God.  
By faith the flag was raised to full staff.

But this is not the end of the encounter. Jesus then replies, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." These are words for us. Just like Thomas, we too stand blind and unable to open our eyes to the things of God. Reason alone takes us only so far.

And if we are being honest, life is good for us, until it isn't... until our own world has been shaken to its core. In those times we too might wonder if maybe, just maybe God is *not* fully in control, or maybe he is *not* interested in us. Have we been gullible?

And in those moments we sound like Thomas: "Lord, this doesn't make sense. Lord this is not how it is supposed to go. Lord, if you are who you say you are, then why this?" But notice what Jesus does. He doesn't wait for Thomas to figure it out. He doesn't demand that Thomas climb his way back to faith. Jesus comes to him. And he does the same for you.

He comes to you not in a locked room, but in his Word.

He comes to you not with visible wounds to touch, but with promises to hear

He comes to you in the waters of Baptism.

He comes to you in his very body and blood.

And in these means he does what you cannot do. He opens your eyes. He creates faith. He lifts the flag all the way to the top.

That's the point of Jesus' words: "Blessed are those who have seen and yet have believed." That is you. That is me. Not because we have figured it out. But because Jesus has come to us.

So, where is your flag today? Half-mast? Struggling? Hanging on by a thread?

If so, hear this: your faith does not rest on how tightly you hold on to Jesus. It rests on how tightly he holds on to you.

And he doesn't let go.

The risen Christ still comes. He still speaks. He still gives sight to the blind.

And by that gift, even you, today, can say with Thomas: "My Lord and my God."

Please pray with me.

Lord Jesus Christ, risen and living, when our understanding fails and our faith falters, come to us as You came to Thomas. Open our blind eyes by Your Word and Spirit, and strengthen us through Your gifts of grace.

Lift our hearts to trust You above what we see and feel, that we may confess with confidence: "My Lord and my God."

For You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Amen.