

# Believing is Seeing

*Readings: Job chapter 19, verses 21 – 27; John chapter 20, verses 19 – 30*

By his own admission John omitted a whole lot of material which he could have included in his gospel. He confines himself to 20 Chapters and deliberately selects those incidents and sayings which would have a relevance for those living 60 years after Jesus died.

So why did he include this incident about Thomas? The answer is easy. Those who heard John preach reacted as many do today. "Its easy for you to believe John. You lived with Jesus for three years. You heard Him preach. You saw Him in action. Even after the resurrection you were able to be with Him. Its not that easy for us. We have only faith to go by. Thomas speaks for us. If only we could reach out our hand and touch Him we too would believe".

So John records this story. Thomas found it impossible to believe that Jesus was alive without some hard, compelling proof. "Unless I see the nailprints in His hands..." Jesus gives him what he asks for; but then goes on to say; "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Thomas speaks for many of us. We are brought up on the slogan 'Seeing is believing'. Everything must be verifiable; capable of being scientifically proved before we believe. To many in 21<sup>st</sup> century "faith" is a cop-out. We want proof. Seeing is believing.

Actually the opposite is true. The Christian Faith insists that if you want to 'see' you must first believe. Believing is seeing!

There are reasons for this. One is that so much of our Faith is incapable of scientific proof. The bedrock of our Faith is belief in God. But there is no way we can prove that God exists. The sooner we acknowledge this the better. The claims that we make are essentially 'faith claims' Too much of our evangelism proceeds on the basis that we are making incontrovertible statements and if people don't believe us we dismiss them as being perverse and blinded by their sinfulness! This gets us nowhere. When people argue that seeing is believing we have got to be open and honest and reverse the slogan. We say "You must believe in order to see".

By way of illustration. It was my first Easter in England and on Easter Monday we visited the village of Lavenham in Suffolk. There is a magnificent Church which stands just outside the village and as we walked up the path toward it only the size of the Church was remarkable. Along the length of the Church were rows of leaded windows which looked grey and bleak and forbidding. But then we went inside the Church and those grey/black windows were transformed. They were revealed as stained glass windows in glorious technicolour. The sun shining through them lit up the colours. But you had to go inside the Church to see that beauty.

The same is true of our Christian Faith. Only when you come inside the Faith do you appreciate its truth. From the outside it might appear irrational and unappealing. But come inside and it lights up. Which is what Charles Wesley sang about:

*"Faith lends its realising light  
the clouds disperse, the shadows fly  
the invisible appears in sight  
And God is seen by mortal eye."*

Can I come at this from another angle? For 5 years my Circuit in Zimbabwe included the Victoria Falls. Its an amazing sight, particularly when the Zambezi river is in full flood. The water plunges over a mile-wide cataract and falls 400ft into a narrow gorge. Its known as the Boiling Pot. So turbulent is the water, so powerful the swirling surge that it is impossible to measure just how deep the Boiling Pot is. They once tried to measure it by dropping lengths of railway line into the

water. The railway line came up a mass of twisted metal, all buckled and bent. The fact is the tools they used to plumb the depths of the Boiling Pot were hopelessly inadequate.

There are such depths to the Christian Faith. It seeks to explore and gauge and understand the mystery of God. All too often we try but the tools we use are inadequate. We try reason and logic but these buckle beneath the Truth. Sooner or later we realise that the Truth can only be stated in the form of paradox and always the mystery still eludes us.

I do not decry either reason or logic. You should have realised that by now. But what I am saying is that these are inadequate tools when it comes to understanding God. Beyond the limits of reason and logic and scientific proof there is an Ultimate Truth accessible only through 'faith'. It is only when we are prepared to believe, to commit ourselves and to obey that the mystery of God opens up to us. And the truth of what we believe is then verified in our subsequent experience.

So it is through believing that we come to know the Truth. And belief is more than mere intellectual assent. It includes acting on what we believe. Jesus said the same thing. He said: "Those who do the will of God shall know the truth of God". It is when we actually get round to doing God's Will and putting belief in practice that we become convinced of the Truth in a way which requires no further proof. So Wesley sang:

*"The things unknown to feeble sense,  
unseen by reason's glimmering ray,  
with strong, commanding evidence  
their heavenly origin display."*

**"Happy are those who have not seen, and yet believe".**