

BELIEVING IS SEEING
Luke 24:1-12 (AFBC 3/27/16)

It's often been said, "Seeing is believing." You've heard that. Maybe you've said it. We've all at least thought it. "I will believe it when I see it—and *only* when I see it." *Seeing...is believing!*

There's a lot of truth in that statement. In fact, it will be our sermon topic NEXT Sunday as we look at one of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus...one that happens to be a very familiar case of "seeing is believing."

But today, I want to suggest to you that "seeing is BELIEVING" also works the other way around: "*Believing...is SEEING!*" As I was pondering how all this comes together in our lives, it occurred to me that seeing and believing are in relationship to one another in much the same way as the proverbial "chicken and egg."

The question is always...what?--"which came first—the chicken or the egg?" And the answer is, as they say, above our pay grade. Probably won't be the *first* thing we'll ask the Lord when we see Him; but sooner or later, I bet we'll get around to it!

"Hey, Lord, I've always wondered about which came first..." And He'll smile. It won't be the first time He's been asked that question, or many others concerning the great mysteries of life.

"Seeing and believing" are in a similar relationship, it seems to me. It's often hard to discern which comes first. So we're going to take a look at both approaches to faith. We're going to look at our Easter faith—faith in a crucified but risen Savior--both ways.

Today, we focus on "Believing Is Seeing." So, with that, let's go to our text:

Luke 24:1-11 ¹ **On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find**

the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" ⁸ Then they remembered his words.

⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

So here we have these women who had *seen* something amazing, and they'd been told what it meant. Now they were trying to tell this to the apostles; but the apostles hadn't seen it, and they weren't buying it. It sounded like *nonsense* to them!

Do you see how there's an interplay going on here between seeing and believing? We deal with this too. How much do you and I have to *see*...before we'll *believe*?

When it comes to the Gospel of our Risen Lord, even without seeing Him with our own eyes, can we believe enough to accept how powerful this Good News is for our lives?

Here it is—the Gospel. Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Heavenly Father, took our sins upon Himself. He suffered and died on a cross. His lifeless body was placed in a tomb. The entrance was sealed. Guards were posted.

But on the morning of the third day, God raised His Son from the dead. Jesus Christ came back to life then, and He's alive today. Now He lovingly and graciously embraces the lives of all of us who

believe this Good News, receiving Him in repentance and faith as Savior and following Him as Lord.

So, on this Easter Sunday, reach down deep and take hold of your truest and most heart-felt convictions. Determine your own answer to this question: "Do you believe this Gospel of the Risen Lord? Even without *seeing*, DO YOU...*BELIEVE*?"

Maybe we should remind ourselves here that whether we believe in the resurrection or not, it doesn't change what happened. That's not to imply that believing in the resurrection is easy.

We all know about Thomas' doubts—"not until I touch His wounds will I believe," he said in John 20:25—certainly one of the best known Biblical examples of "*seeing...is believing*."

According to Luke, though, they ALL had their doubts—serious doubts. Again, "**...they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.**" (Luke 24:11)

Believing is not easy, friends. Faith takes some effort. It forces us to ask tough questions.

It's why so many reject the Gospel altogether; and others keep putting off any decision about what happened back then. They keep asking for a bit more information—they want to "see" more--before they decide.

The late Dr. L. D. Johnson, who was Chaplain at Furman University back when Pam and I were students there, tells this story about his grandchildren in his book called *Moments of Reflection*:

Laura, five, and Carol, nine, were discussing the Easter bunny as they rode along in the back seat of our car. Carol said she didn't believe in the Easter bunny. Laura called to the front seat, "Grandma, do you believe in the Easter bunny?"

"No," Marion answered, "I don't." "Do you believe in the Easter bunny, Pop?" she asked me.

Being the eldest and wisest of several theologians in our family, I took it upon myself to lecture on the origins and meanings of the Easter bunny. It would have been a dilly, but I only got a couple of sentences in when Laura, sensing where that was going, interrupted: "Do you believe? That's all I want to know."

Well...it's not just a cute story. It really gets to the heart of the decision that each of us must make: do we believe...in Easter? Do we accept by faith the Good News that Jesus Christ conquered sin, death, and the grave, and is now risen?

Do we believe it, friends, to the point of staking our lives and futures on it? Have we embraced Christ Jesus as our Risen Lord and Savior. Or, when someone really pushes us on this, do we find the Easter Gospel...a bit too much to swallow? We just can't see it!

Please don't dismiss the question because, well...maybe you'd just rather not be bothered with a lot of thinking today. The question is too important, and it won't go away.

Sooner or later, you have to deal with it. Sooner is better, of course; and today, Easter Sunday, is best of all! So, DECIDE!

1. Let's try something. To get at the answer to our big question, let's try to come at this from a "believing is seeing" perspective. We'll start with this: **BELIEVING...IS SEEING...THAT OUR SINS CAN BE FORGIVEN.**

The Easter story makes the audacious claim that all the harmful effects that sin and evil have on our lives are overcome by Christ's death and resurrection.

There's plenty of evidence that we live in "a world gone wild." The news is filled with stories of fallen people wreaking havoc in a fallen world. Sin takes its toll; so we can't deal with the Easter question until we take sin seriously.

But people don't do that so much anymore. Continuing to speak of "sin" in the 21st Century seems to them to be "nonsense."

But think about this: if *sin* is nonsense, *Easter* doesn't make any sense either. Nothing that transpired during Holy Week "adds up" unless the problem of sin gets included in the equation.

Do we believe that sin is still a problem in our lives? Do we believe that only Christ Jesus and what He's done for us can overcome this problem?

Scripture says, **"If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)**

This may sound like nonsense to some, but I believe it with all my heart. I'm grateful that in spite of the ugliness of our sin, God doesn't require anything "earth shaking" from us to forgive our sin.

When we believe the Gospel, admitting our need and confessing our sin, God forgives us. How liberating it is when we take this to heart and believe it!

It's only as we *believe*, however, that we begin to see the change this is making in our lives. **Believing is seeing!**

Do you know in your heart that you've confessed your sin and received the cleansing grace of forgiveness? Do you believe this? Good--but there's more:

2. BELIEVING IS SEEING...THAT DEATH CAN BE CONQUERED. Now, this is all wrapped up with that last issue—the one about sins being forgiven.

It was not God's intention for us to die. It wasn't His fault we chose to sin; but He was always clear about the fact that "the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23)

We know this as a verse in Romans, but this message is also found way back there at the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis: **'If you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you will die,' God said (Genesis 2:17)**--which, of course, like children

being told not to touch a hot stove, they promptly did! *Seeing is believing*, after all.

Since sin and death are all wrapped up together, God's answer for this destructive pair is also two inseparable events: Jesus' death, and His resurrection.

The wages of our sin were paid in full when Jesus Christ died on the cross. But coupled with that, death was overcome when on that first Easter morning, Christ rose from the grave. We see this because we choose to *believe* it! *Believing is seeing*!

I guess we could get around the sin question by just saying we don't believe there's such a thing as sin. But, for obvious reasons, that doesn't work with death. We need a better answer for death than...well, we just don't believe it exists.

There's a story about a man who had been "boozing it up." A police officer spotted him looking for something. He learned that the man was down on his hands and knees looking for his keys.

The officer asked him, "Where did you lose them?" The man slung his arm around and said, "About a block up that way."

The officer, doing his best not to laugh, asked, "So why are you searching for them here?" To which the inebriated man replied, "Well, there is no street light down there!"

Sometimes, friends, we look in the wrong places too. We search for answers to life's biggest dilemmas in places where they can't be found.

When it comes to life's ultimate dilemma, that last enemy death, there's only one answer, and it's found in only one place—where the Light is...the Light of the World, Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord.

But it's only as we believe this...that we're able to see it. *Believing is seeing*.

3. Now, a final Easter truth for us to consider: **BELIEVING IS SEEING...THAT LIFE CAN BE ABUNDANT.**

In Christ Jesus, our sins are forgiven—as Christians, we believe this. In Him, death is conquered and the gift of eternal life is ours—we believe this too.

But there's more, and you don't want to miss this. In Christ, we experience life right now in a whole new dimension.

It's a wonderful truth that we can live after we die. We look forward in hope to our heavenly home, and rightfully so!

But it's an equally great truth that through the power of Christ's resurrection, we have abundant life now.

It's so easy to miss this in our kind of world because most of us have such an abundance already—an abundance of stuff; an abundance of experiences too--but listen: that's not...abundant LIFE.

You don't have to be a "believer" in anything to have loads of expensive stuff and exciting experiences--but none of it will ever take the place of abundant life! If we're not careful, all the stuff can get in the way of the quality of life God wants to give us.

But, you know, it's only when we *believe* that we're able to see this. There are many things that don't make sense about this Gospel—until...you believe it, until you place your faith in Christ Jesus, the Savior who died to take away our sin, and lives again to give us life—and not just when we die. The life He gives begins now--abundant life--for each day we live, now...and forever.

Yes, to some this sounds like nonsense--but trust Christ. Follow Christ. Love and obey Him as Savior and Lord of your life, and a wonderful thing happens. Jesus Christ begins to make all the sense in the world.

As a believer, you'll see this. As you follow Christ, this will become clear. And soon, you won't be able to imagine your life...without Him! *Believing...is seeing!*

Hymn No. _____