

SEEING IS BELIEVING
Luke 24:33-40 (AFBC 4/3/16)

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

³⁶ While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." ⁴⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.

Seeing Is Believing! That's true, isn't it? Now, if you were here last Sunday—Easter Sunday—we turned that around: "Believing Is Seeing." It can work that way as well; but today, we'll go back to the more familiar way of hearing this: Seeing Is Believing.

Do you believe that Jesus Christ rose from the grave? Are there any doubts in your mind that this really happened?

Let's suppose for a moment that a group of people, for whatever reason, decide to start a new religion. They know it's not true, but they just want to see how far this new religion can spread. They come up with a real good story, and begin telling it as "the Gospel truth."

But let's say the authorities hear about it, and they declare this new religion to be illegal. They make those who are spreading it pay big fines--but they keep on telling the story. They get thrown in jail, but this doesn't stop them. So the authorities start executing the leaders of this new religion...

But wait a minute. Do you really think they would let it get this far—imprisonment and even death for something that's not even true!?! It wouldn't be worth that!

Now think about those early followers of Jesus. THEY were beaten, thrown in jail, put to death—but none of this deterred them. No amount of persecution caused them to turn their backs on their Lord. If following Jesus Christ meant imprisonment, torture, or death, so be it—they remained faithful to the end.

Why? Because this was no made-up story, no foolish prank to prey upon the gullibleness of others. They knew Jesus died on the cross. And they had seen the risen Lord. When doubts arose, and they began thinking that this might just be a ghost they were seeing, Jesus assured them otherwise.

"Touch me and see," he says, "a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones, as you see I have." Then Luke tells us, "When he had said this, he showed them His hands and feet."(Luke 24:39-40)

Moments before, these followers of Jesus were gathered behind locked doors. They were shaking in their sandals for fear of being discovered. What if those who crucified Jesus came for them next—they fully expected it, in fact—so they were in hiding.

Suddenly, there He was. The door was still locked and the windows bolted, but there was Jesus standing in their midst. "Peace be with you," he said, just as He always had before. Easier said than done, though—don't you think? Peace—really?

While they were still struggling to get their minds around all this, Jesus showed them His hands and feet. He invited them to touch Him, even to touch those wounds in His body.

This really was Jesus, the crucified but now very much living Lord. They BELIEVED when they saw the nail holes in His hands and feet, they were convinced--and soon they set out to convince the world--that CHRIST IS RISEN! (He is risen indeed!)

Don't you find it interesting that Jesus didn't try to hide his wounds. He wasn't embarrassed by his disfigurement. Jesus invited the disciples to touch Him--to be sure.

Later, the Apostle John began his first letter by saying, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at...and our hands have touched..." (I John 1:1).

An artist named Harry Anderson painted a picture of the nail-pierced hands of Jesus. He's with a group of children. Jesus is talking with them, and he's gesturing with His hands as he talks.

A child sitting on Jesus' lap catches a glimpse of the ugly wound in His hand. With all the genuineness and compassion of a child, she asks, "What happened to your hand?"

We know what happened. The soldiers drove a huge nail through each of Jesus' hands. But of all the places to drive a nail, who would ever think of driving it through someone's hand--especially, those hands?

Those hands gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf.
Those hands cured the cripple and cleansed the leper.
They blessed little children and even raised the dead.

But they pierced those hands with a hammer and nails. Do you see the irony? He who worked with a hammer and nails in the carpenter's shop in Nazareth allowed nails to be hammered into his own body. To "take away the sin of the world," He did this.

Not only did those nail holes identify him, they also told the story of his love. How it must have broken His disciples' hearts as they realized those horrible wounds were the price Jesus paid for them.

"He showed them his hands and feet," and they believed! Seeing is believing. Jesus, the crucified one, was now RISEN!

Do you realize that only those who believed in Jesus ever saw His wounds after the resurrection? Pilate never saw them. Nor did King Herod. Annas and Caiaphas didn't see them either.

But Peter, James, and John saw them. Thomas and the rest of the eleven saw them. Mary Magdalene saw them and the other faithful women. It had to be painful, but they saw them.

Those disfigured hands broke the bread and fish for the disciples when they had breakfast together on the shores of Galilee. Those punctured hands were raised in blessing over the crowd that watched as He ascended into heaven.

Only those who believed in Him saw his wounds and felt the joy of Jesus' love for them portrayed in those hands. It is still so today. Only those who love him in return and trust in his grace and mercy can see with the eyes of faith those hands and feet with those deep scars still in them.

Can you see those wounded hands of Jesus reaching out for you in your time of need, bringing a healing touch in times of sickness, an encouraging embrace in times of distress, or wiping away your tears of grief? Only the faithful feel the presence of those loving hands.

Someday, those of us who have placed our trust in Jesus Christ, and in Christ alone—trusting in Him to save us and restore our relationship with God--someday, we will see those wounds of Jesus for ourselves.

When we see our Lord face to face, we'll also see his nail-scarred hands and feet. Then we'll know more than ever before how much our Lord and Savior loves us—for Him to endure that pain and shame and disfigurement for our sake.

Think about this: if you and I were planning it, don't you think we would have had Jesus rise from the grave with the mutilation of the

cross all removed from his body--his hands and feet and side completely healed, as if the cross had never happened?

But God did it differently--seems He always does! Perhaps those nail prints will never be removed, but serve instead as eternal reminders of His great love for us. They tell more than words ever could of how important we are to him. Seeing is believing.

You and I will need those mutilated hands one day—at the final judgment. When Satan accuses us of all our sins, and tries to make the case that we really belong to him--this will be the most critical moment of our existence.

If we have trusted in Jesus Christ, and his atoning death for us, it will then be Jesus' turn to take up hammer and nails—and this time the Carpenter from Nazareth will do the hammering.

The Lord Jesus will take that long list of our sins and nail them to his cross forever. The terrible guilt and deadly power of our sins will plague our lives no more. They will all be nailed to the Cross of Jesus.

It is only those cross-mutilated hands of Jesus that can lift us out of the mire of sin and place us on the high ground of salvation and eternal life. Only Jesus can do that! The poet, John Richard Moreland, wrote:

"The hands of Christ seem very frail,
For they were broken by a nail.
But only they reach heaven at last,
Whom these frail, broken hands hold fast."

Have you placed your life in the nail-pierced hands of Jesus? If not, He invites you to do so today. His hands are reaching out for you right now, His loving arms are extended in your direction--if you will but respond in faith by taking hold of his hand, seeing the answer to your own need in those nail prints, and trusting him completely as Your Savior and Lord. Will you?

When we do, friends, there's more. Those of us who turn to Jesus in faith will see those precious hands one day—the hands of our living Lord. But on that day, we must also show Him our hands. Hopefully, there will be no nail holes in them, but will there be any other marks—marks that reveal how we've used our hands for others?

We sing "Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of Thy love." The work of our hands cannot save us before a holy God, but the marks of ministry upon our hands will indicate our love for our Lord and our gratitude for his saving grace.

Many years ago there were two young men who wanted to be artists. The trouble was they had no money. They decided that one of them would work full-time to support them, while the other studied full-time in art school.

The older one volunteered to work first, taking a job in a restaurant, washing dishes, cleaning tables and scrubbing floors. He worked long and hard, always looking forward to the time when he would have his turn at studying art.

Meanwhile his friend completed his schooling, sold a successful work of art and earned enough money to get the older one started in school.

But it was too late. The rough work of washing and scrubbing in the restaurant had stiffened the hands of the older man. His enlarged joints and gnarled fingers could not hold a brush delicately anymore.

This made the younger man very sad. One day he came into the room and found his older friend with his hands together in prayer. He was inspired to paint those work-worn hands, just as they were – swollen knuckles, broken nails, gnarled fingers-- a symbol of self-sacrificing service.

For 400 years now, that famous painting, "Praying Hands" by Albrecht Durer, has opened people's eyes to the beauty that can be seen in hands—praying hands, yes, but also hands that are well-worn from serving others.

What is it that makes our hands beautiful? Is it a professional manicure? Painted nails? Costly lotions? Not in God's sight. He looks for hands that are willing to carry a cross for others.

He looks for hands that write letters or make phone calls or knock at the doors of those who are sick or lonely or lost; hands that labor over a Sunday School lesson in order to convey Bible truths to a class; hands that change diapers in the nursery so young parents can be in a SS class and in worship;...
...hands that write generous checks for church and charity; hands that reach out to welcome visitors after a Bible class or worship service; hands that get involved in the many ways in which we try to minister in this community in which God has placed us. He looks for hands like yours.

When you and I show the Lord our hands, what will He see? It all depends on whether we have truly seen in the nail-pierced hands of Jesus the amazing love God has for us—whether we've embraced those hands of Jesus as our only hope of salvation, and then allowed those precious hands to guide our hands in self-giving acts of service for others.

Look at the hands of Jesus, and realize that they've given you and me everything. Then let's look at our own hands. What are they giving in return?

The message of the cross, the Easter Gospel, is never very convincing until it is obvious to the world that Jesus Christ is alive in us—that He lives through us--our hearts and hands and feet and voices. **When the world sees this—they believe!**

Are you convinced your Savior lives? Then live like it! Do you know you serve a risen Lord today? Then make sure your hands and feet show it! After all, seeing is believing!